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THE NEW YORKER

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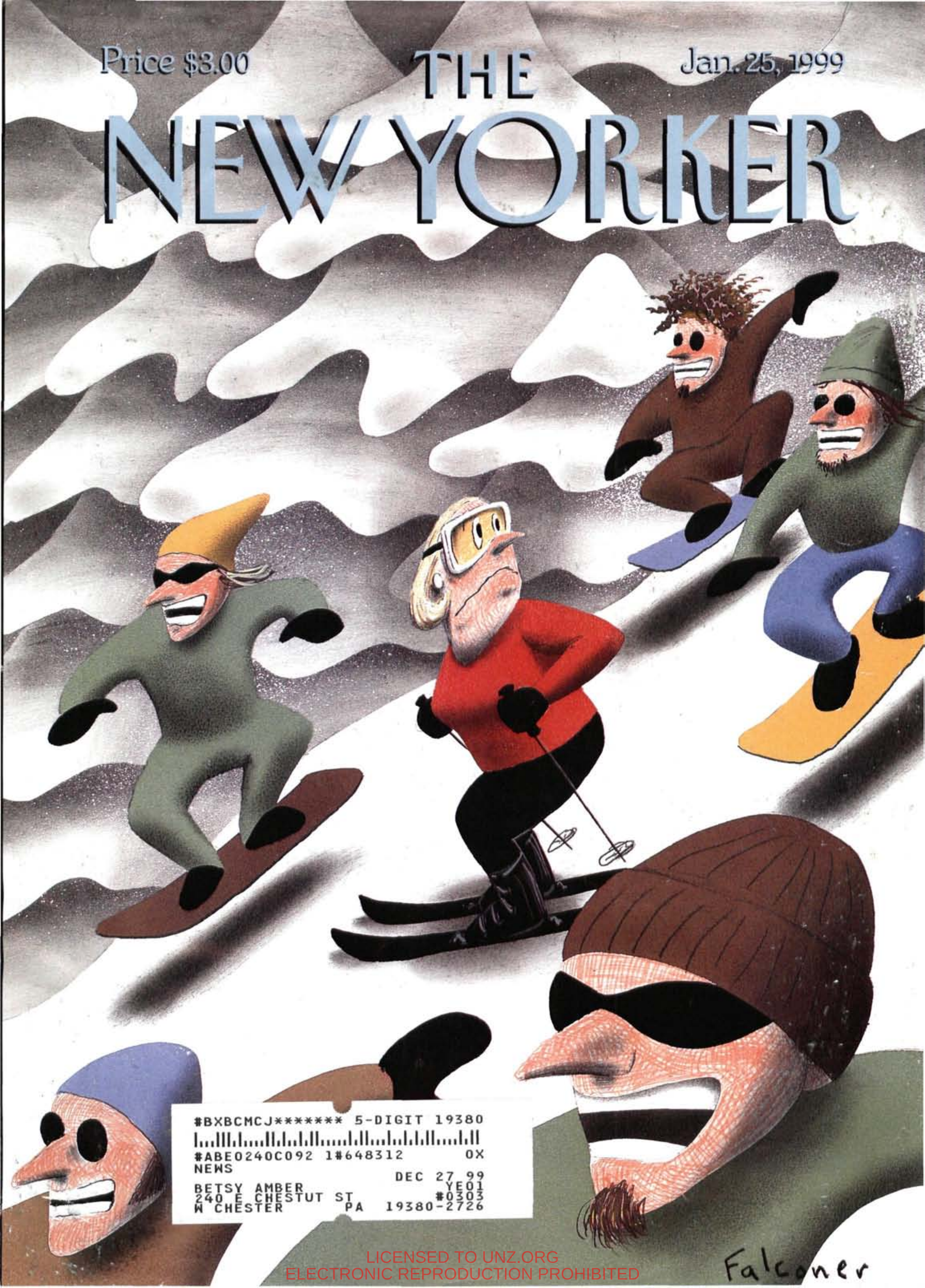

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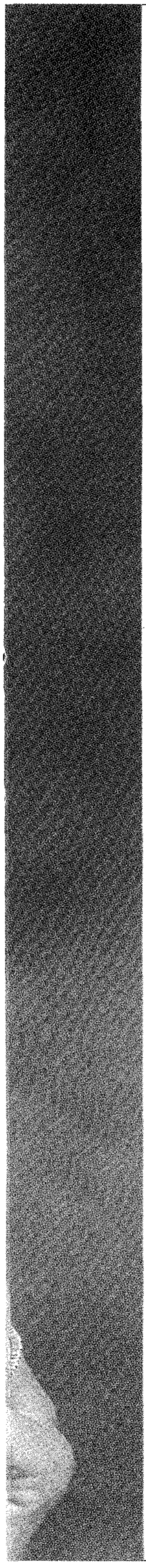

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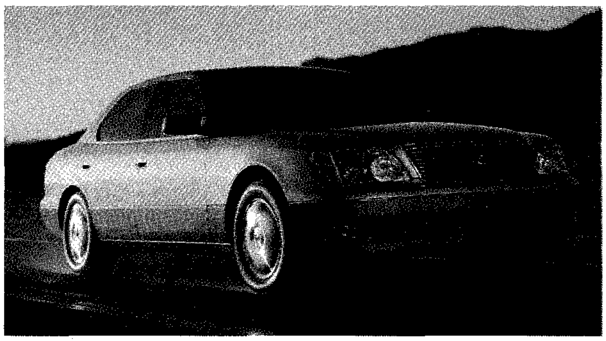

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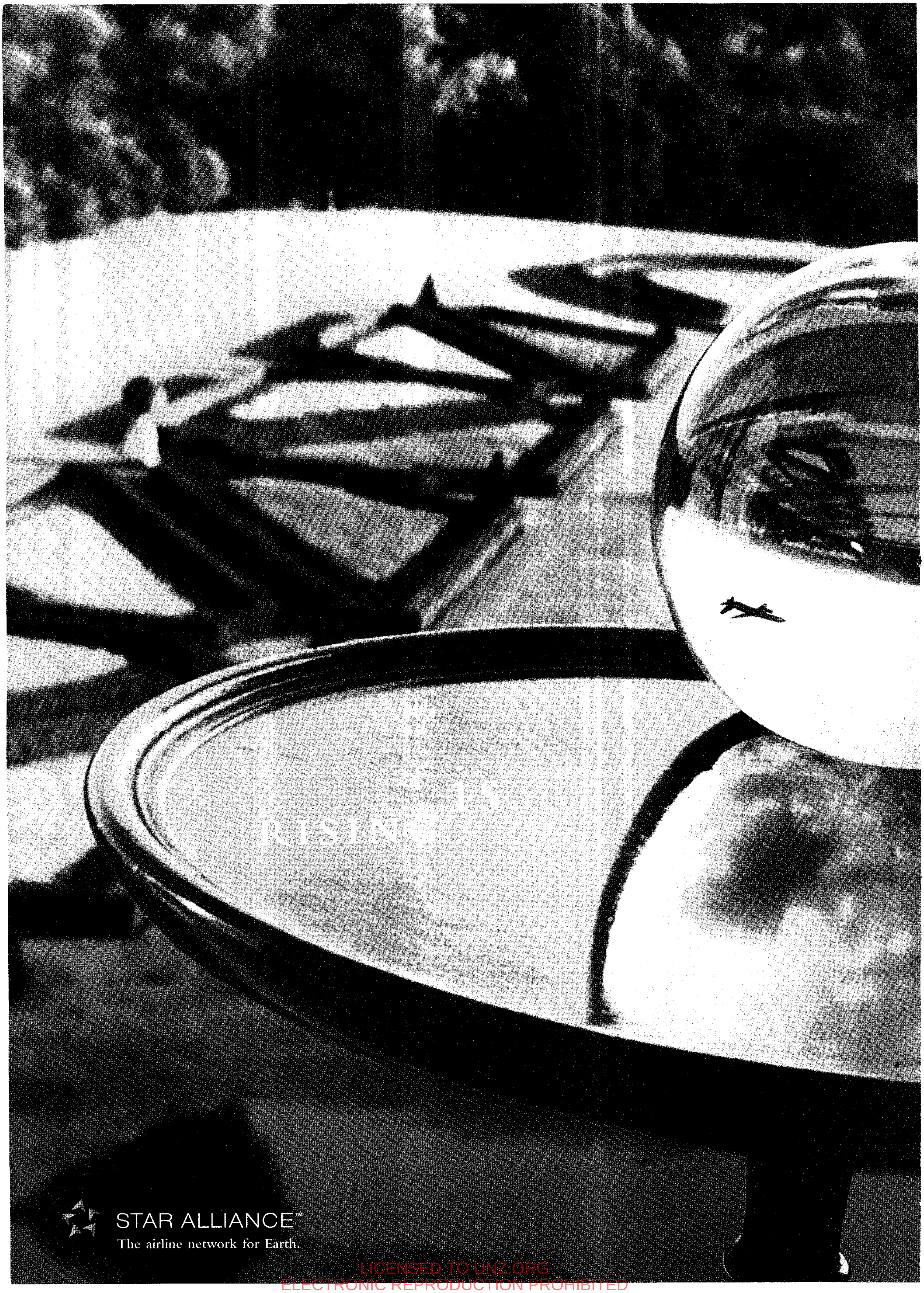
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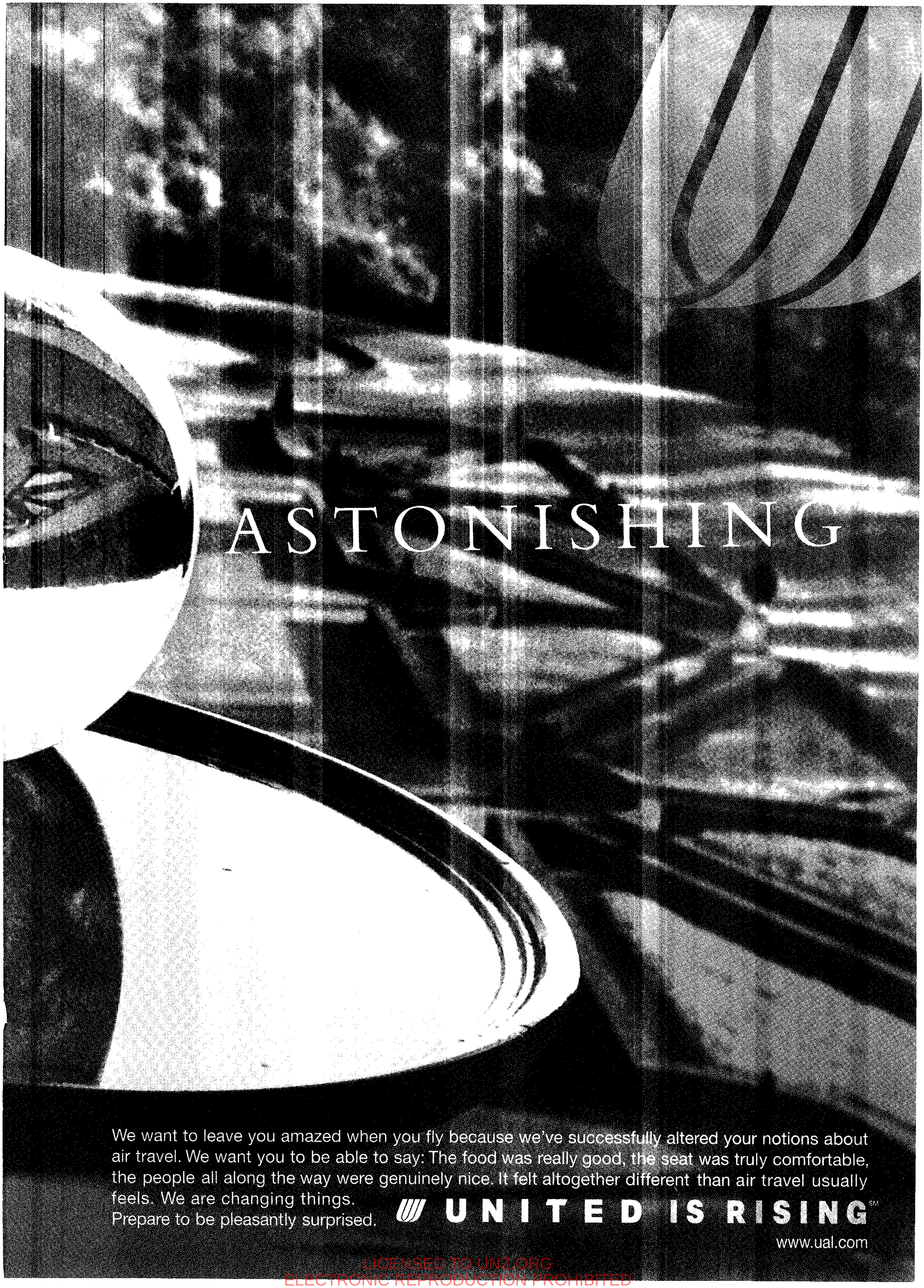

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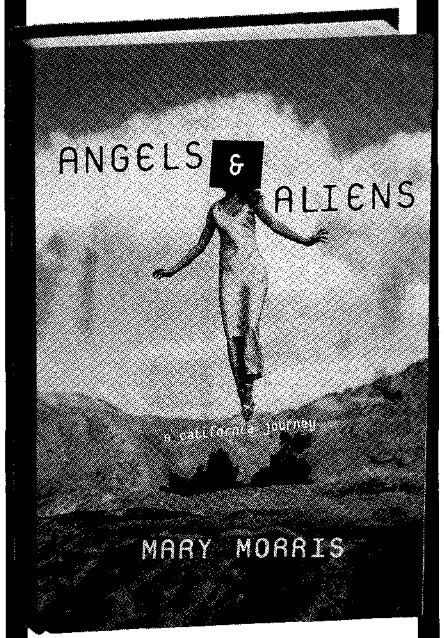

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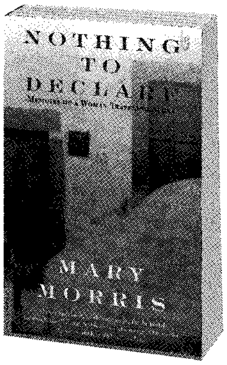

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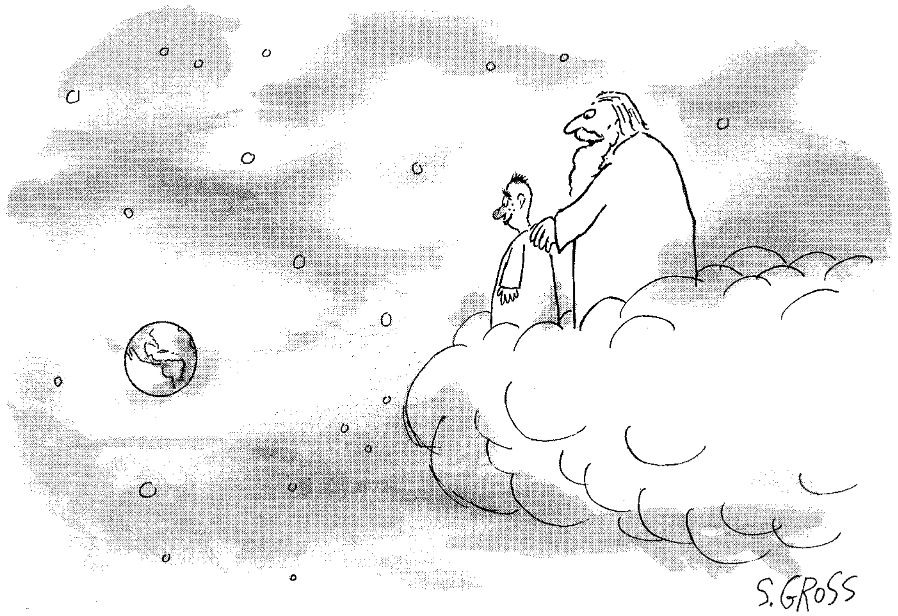

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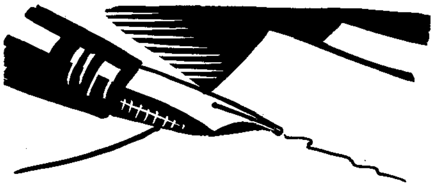

ALTERNATIVE HOPES

John Lahr's recent article about Bob Hope ("The C.E.O. of Comedy," December 21st) reminded me of the time Hope stopped at the home base of the 354th Fighter Group, in Germany, where I was a pilot, shortly after the end of the Second World War. He and Jerry Colonna, a comedian who was Hope's sidekick, got into an impromptu game of billiards in the Officers' Club, and each of them was cheating whenever he thought the other wasn't looking. They put on a really fine show for those of us who were watching. At one point, Hope missed a shot and said, "You red-ass bastard!" A Red Cross lady had just walked in, and when she heard his language she walked right out. Hope saw her leave and got very upset. He followed her to the door and apologized profusely. She kept going, and he quipped, "Nothing personal." He was always ready to make a joke, and always ready to talk to the troops even when a performance wasn't scheduled. Lahr has pointed out another side of Hope's nature, but his work during that war and others was a magnificent morale builder, and those of us who were there still appreciate it.

George G. Roberts
Panama City, Fla.

Mr. Lahr may have underestimated the iconoclasm of Bob Hope's persona. Hope got the ultimate accolade that can be accorded a subversive: a mention from the science-fiction writer Philip K. Dick, a prince of gnostic doubt. In Dick's alternative-reality classic, "The Man in the High Castle," the Axis wins the Second World War and the Germans and the Japanese partition America. Where's Bob? Dick writes, "He has to broadcast from Canada. . . . But Hope really says things. . . . He told this really funny joke, the one where this German major is interviewing some Martians. The Martians can't provide racial documentation about their grandparents' being Aryan, you know. So the German major reports back to Berlin that Mars is populated by Jews. . . . You know how Bob Hope goes on."

Michael Stern
Palo Alto, Calif.

RULES OF EVIDENCE

In his Comment of January 11th, Malcolm Gladwell makes some brief and, I think, unjust remarks about Jonathan Harr's "A Civil Action." Gladwell asserts that Harr's book, like the movie based on it, takes "as a given that the chemical allegedly dumped [in Woburn, Massachusetts], trichloroethylene (TCE), is a human carcinogen—even though, in point of fact, TCE is only a probable human carcinogen." But, in point of fact, Harr's book (I haven't seen the movie) clearly establishes this point of fact. Gladwell adds, "It is also taken as a given that the particular carcinogenic properties of TCE were what resulted in the town's leukemia outbreak." Some of the people who appear in the book "A Civil Action" do take that as a given, and others argue that they're wrong, but the authorial voice does neither. It expresses only agnosticism.

Harr wrote about a lawsuit that raised questions that science couldn't answer definitively. He should be forgiven for believing that the case was interesting and that industrial pollution is an important issue—and even for harboring the assumption that, in spite of scientific uncertainties, no one should have to drink or shower in water contaminated by TCE.

Tracy Kidder
Williamsburg, Mass.

Malcolm Gladwell replies:

Tracy Kidder is right; I was wrong. To his credit, Jonathan Harr does indeed acknowledge that the evidence linking TCE to the Woburn leukemia cluster is less than conclusive.

•

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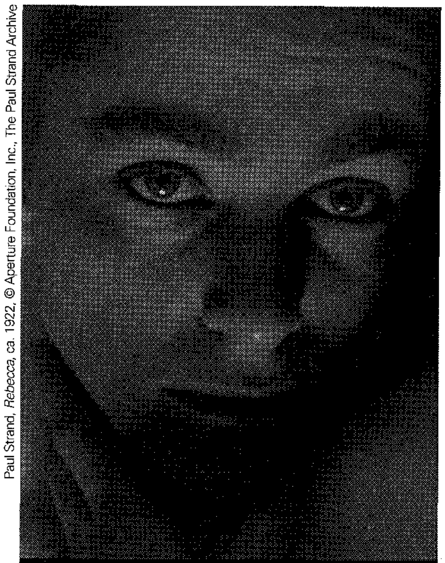

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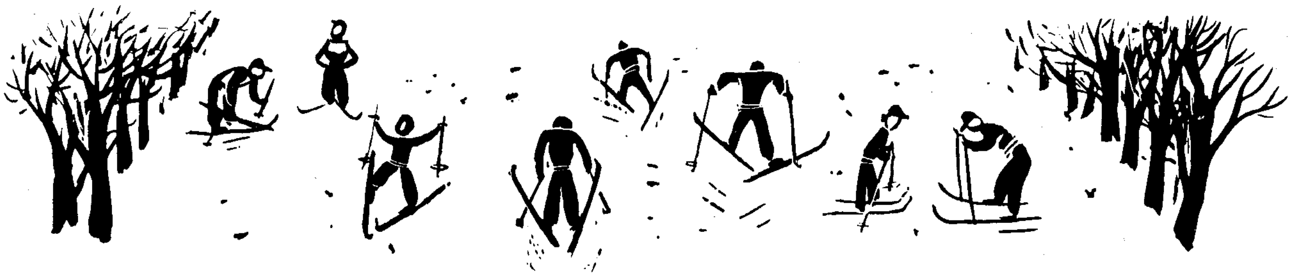

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Ashes to Ashes—The Roundabout Theatre Company's staging of Harold Pinter's new play, directed by Karel Reisz, stars Lindsay Duncan and David Strathairn. In previews. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

Captains Courageous: The Musical—Manhattan Theatre Club presents Treat Williams and Brandon Espinoza in a tuneful version of Kipling's novel. With music by Frederick Freyer and book and lyrics by Patrick Cook. In previews. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Correct Me If I'm Right—The political humorist Kate Clinton's one-woman show. In previews. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-4100.)

The Eros Trilogy—Betty Buckley, T. Scott Cunningham, and Zak Orth star in three short works by Nicky Silver, centered on the mother-and-son relationship. David Warren is the director. Previews begin Jan. 21. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874.)

High Life—Four morphine-blitzed crooks plot a bank heist, in a black comedy by first-time playwright Lee MacDougall. In previews. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

House/Lights—Gertrude Stein's libretto for the opera "Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights" and the 1964 cult film "Olga's House of Shame" are the inspirations for the Wooster Group's latest work. In previews. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

Iphigenia Cycle—Theatre for a New Audience presents Euripides' "Iphigenia at Aulis" and "Iphigenia in Tauris," under the direction of JoAnne Akalaitis. In previews through Jan. 23. Opens Jan. 24 at 6:30. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Jean Cocteau Repertory—Preview performances of Shaw's 1899 play "Caesar and Cleopatra" are running in repertory with the company's staging of Joe Orton's comedy "Loot." (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

Little by Little—Liz Larsen, Christiane Noll, and Darrin Baker portray childhood friends who become involved in a love triangle as adults, in a new musical from the York Theatre Company. With music by Brad Ross, lyrics by Ellen Greenfield and Hal Hackady, and a story by Ms. Greenfield and Annette Jolles. Two previews on Jan. 20. Opens Jan. 21 at 8. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820.)

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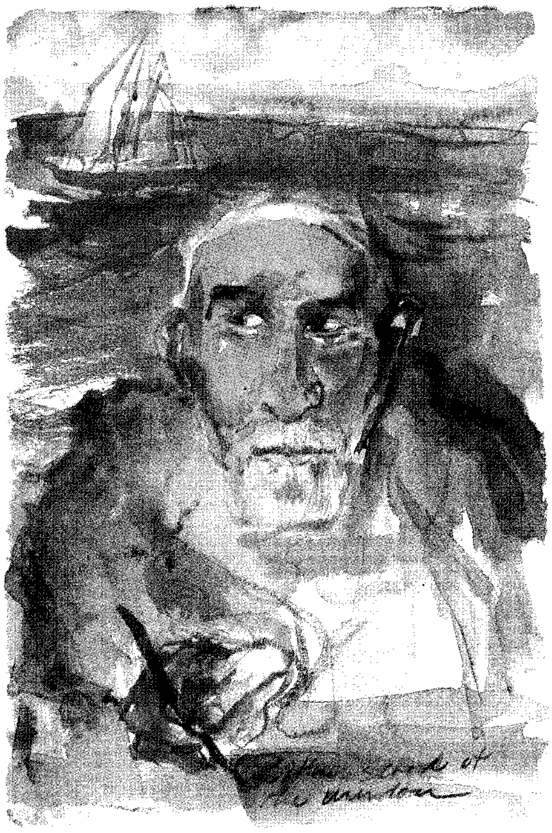
A Majority of One—A Jewish widow (Phyllis Newman) falls in love with a retired Japanese businessman (Randall Duk Kim), in Leonard Spigelgass's 1959 comedy, set aboard a cruise ship after the Second World War. In previews through Jan. 23. Opens Jan. 24 at 7. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

The Mineola Twins—In Paula Vogel's dark comedy, set during the Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan years, Swoosie Kurtz portrays both a good sister and her evil twin. Mo Gaffney is also in the cast. Directed by Joe Mantello. In previews. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 719-9300.)

Shanghai Moon—Another movie spoof from the pen of Charles Busch, who stars as the wife of a British diplomat in nineteen-thirties China. Performances begin Jan. 20. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109.)



Athol Fugard, in his memoir "The Captain's Tiger," at Manhattan Theatre Club.

DEBORAH ROSS

Stuck—A new play by Jessica Goldberg, about a woman trying to find her way out of a dead-end life in a small town. Previews Jan. 21-23. Opens Jan. 24 at 7. (Theatre Off Park, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 627-2556.)

You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown—Clark Gesner's 1967 musical based on the Charles Schulz comic strip, directed by Michael Mayer. Starring Anthony Rapp as C.B., B. D. Wong as Linus, and Roger Bart as Snoopy. Previews begin Jan. 23. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Awake and Sing—Anne Jackson leads the cast in an Actors Studio staging of Clifford Odets' 1935 drama, about a lower-class Bronx family. (Raw Space, 529 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Jan. 31.)

The Blue Room—Nicole Kidman is beautiful, leggy, and damn good at her job, and she and her excellent co-star, Iain Glen, have real chemistry, but it takes all of their charisma to give the cardboard characters and the charmless script an iota of life. David Hare followed Arthur Schnitzler's game plan in this adaptation of his Viennese sexual merry-go-round, "La Ronde," so the shallowness of the characters is not entirely Hare's fault; his contribution is the brittle dialogue, which makes the series of sad seductions all the more insufferable. There's nothing erotic here, and even the news of Ms. Kidman's nudity has been greatly exaggerated. Directed by Sam Mendes. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/28/98 & 1/4/99.) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Book of Wren—A dramatic fable by Bronwen Denton Davis, about a medieval abbot obsessed with the power to heal. Jeffrey Hayenga, Tracy Sallows, and Ben Shaeffer are in the cast. (Miranda Theatre, 259 W. 30th St. 268-9829, ext. 1. Closes Jan. 31.)

The Captain's Tiger—A theatrical memoir, set on a steamer bound for Asian ports, by the South African playwright Athol Fugard, who leads the cast. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

The Cherry Orchard—A Westside Repertory Theatre staging of Chekhov's play, directed by Alex Roe. (252 W. 81st St. 874-7290.)

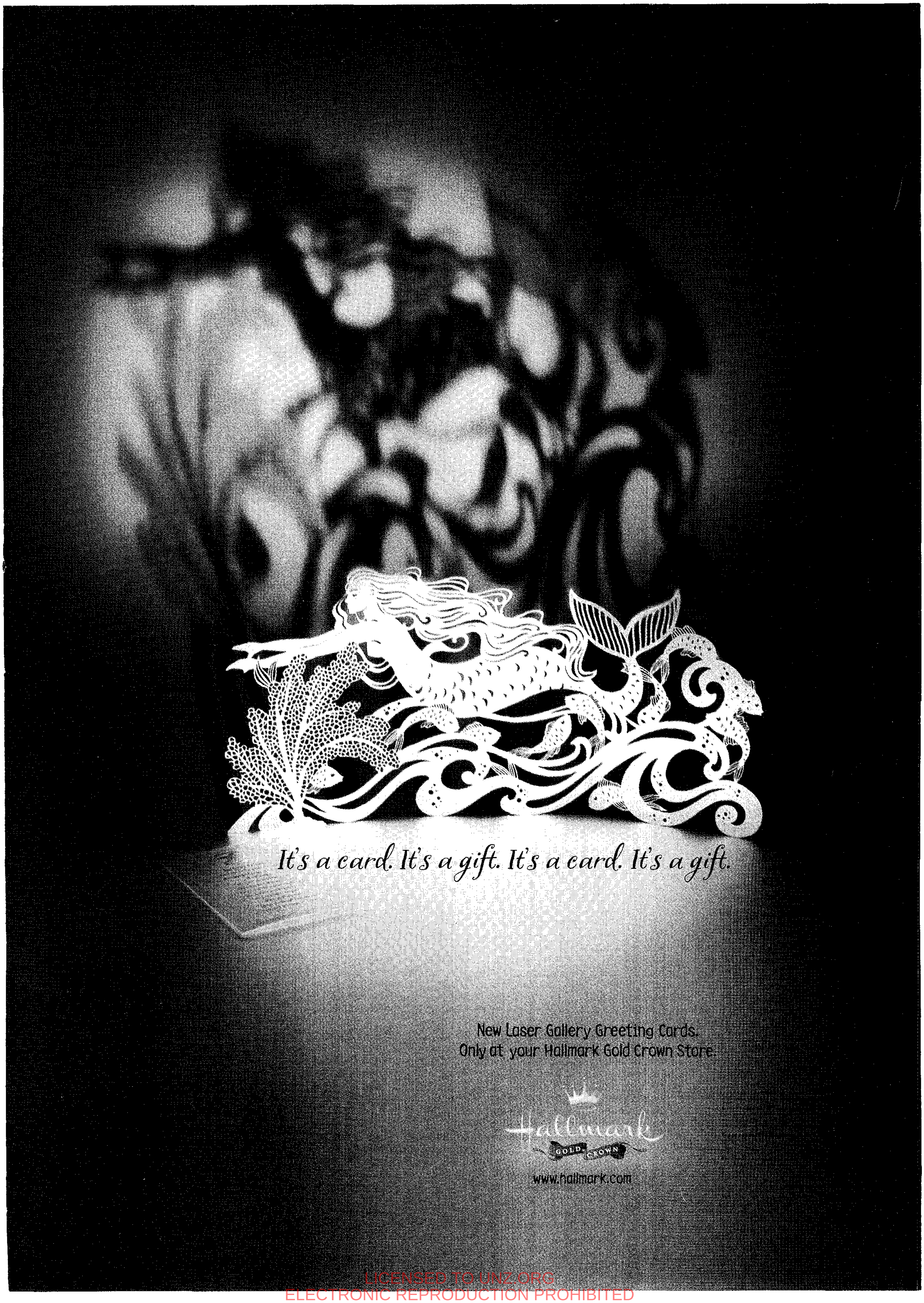
Chicago City Limits—The improv company presents a new revue, "Subpoenas Envy." (Chicago City Limits Theatre, First Ave. at 61st St. 888-5233.)

Collected Stories—Despite a splendid performance by Uta Hagen, as an aging writer who tells her protégée the one story about her own life which she hasn't written, this revival of Donald Margulies's 1997 drama only points out how poorly constructed the relationship between the two women is. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

The Country Wife—The Pearl Theatre Company's production of Wycherley's Restoration comedy. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Jan. 31.)

A Couple of Blaguards—Shay Duffin and Mickey Kelly perform Frank and Malachy McCourt's two-man autobiographical show. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Electra—When the superb Zoë Wanamaker first appears onstage in the title role of David Leveaux's powerful production of Sophocles' tragedy (in a new version by Frank McGuinness), she is wedged in an alcove halfway up the exterior wall of her dead father's palace, wearing the ancient mask of tragedy; she descends to earth and takes off the mask to show us the modern face of torment. It is the first of several huge,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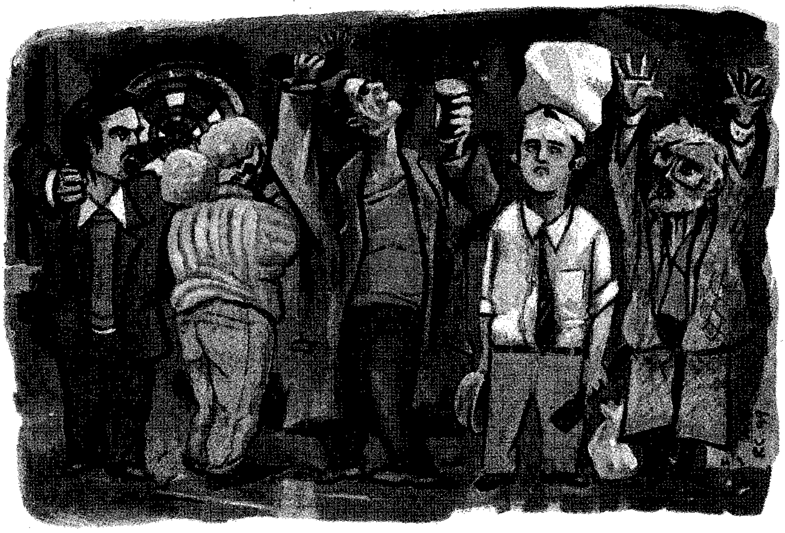
shrewdly staged moments in a production that allows the play's bewildering brutality to come through as clearly as yesterday's headlines. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

An Evening with Quentin Crisp—The author, actor, and wit celebrates his ninetieth year, with a return engagement of his one-man show. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 330-7200. Closes Jan. 31.)

Far East—An American military officer (Michael Hayden) is caught in a triangle involving his commander's wife, in a drama by A. R. Gurney, set during the Korean War. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Footloose—A musical adaptation of the 1984 film, co-written by Dean Pitchford (who also wrote the screenplay) and Walter Bobbie. With music by Tom Snow and lyrics by Mr. Pitchford. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)



"Some Voices," by Joe Penhall, at St. Clement's.

RUSSELL CHRISTIAN

Fosse—A tribute to the choreographer's work, created by Richard Maltby, Jr. (director), Ann Reinking (co-director/co-choreographer), and Chet Walker (choreography re-creator). (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Killer Joe—In Tracy Letts's graphic dark comedy, an American family striving for a better life—in this case, a bunch of losers living in a trailer outside Dallas—hires a hit man to help things along. Though the experience sometimes feels like being trapped in Sam Shepard's claustrophobic Nowheresville while being smacked around by Quentin Tarantino, the terrific production is so vividly unself-conscious that you hardly feel assaulted at all—in fact, you enjoy it. Wilson Milam is the director. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

Little Me—Martin Short carries this musical-comedy relic on his cute little shoulders with ease. But the show—a spoof of celebrity rags-to-riches stories, which originally starred Sid Caesar, in 1962, in multiple roles—*is* a relic, so audience members not madly in love with Short (who are these people?) may find themselves scratching their heads, wondering how the innocent/ribald silliness ever inspired more than minor laughs. The rest of the cast is pretty much generic, with the exception of the wonderful Faith Prince, and unfortunately she's miscast. Written by Neil Simon (book), Cy Coleman (music), and Carolyn Leigh (lyrics). Direction and choreography are by Rob Marshall. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300. Closes Feb. 7.)

Lyz!—A New Yorker leads her women's political-action group in a sex strike to clean up city violence, in this musical update of Aristophanes' "Lysistrata." Book and lyrics by Joe Lauinger; music by Jim Cowdery. (Samuel Beckett, 412 W. 42nd St. 353-7832. Closes Jan. 31.)

The Mystery of Irma Vep—It's not difficult to imagine what made this farce a hit back in 1984: the play's author and original star, the immensely gifted Charles Ludlam, who died in 1987 of complications due to AIDS. As staged and performed by that production's co-star, Everett Quinton, this version ends up a bore, despite its fairly outré conceit—"Rebecca" meets Agatha Christie meets pure camp. Drag has been out of the closet for a long time now; this is an artifact of a more innocent time. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Over the River and Through the Woods—In Joe DiPietro's new comedy, a young man planning his future clashes with his four Italian-American grandparents. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Parade—This musical, co-conceived and directed by Hal Prince, with a book by Alfred Uhry and lyrics and music by Jason Robert Brown, revisits the case of Leo Frank, a college-educated Northern Jew who in 1913 was accused of murdering a teen-age girl in the Atlanta pencil factory that he managed, only to be taken from jail in 1915 by anti-Semitic vigilantes and lynched. It is generally believed that Frank was railroaded, and for the entire first act this show feels like a train hauling a heavy cargo of exposition uphill to a preset destination. The second act, in which Lucille Frank fights to save her husband's life, picks up some steam, but the ride is never quite exhilarating, despite its heady moments. The hard work that went into "Parade" is transparent, but in the theatre it's originality, not earnestness, that wins the day. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Paradise Hotel—A new mind bender from the director and writer Richard Foreman, about a group of travellers searching for sexual nirvana. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Prater Violet—An adaptation by Will Pomerantz of Christopher Isherwood's 1945 novel. (The Salon, 432 E. 91st St. 388-8188. Closes Feb. 14.)

P.S. 122—Jan. 20-24 at 7:30: "Ben Franklin: Unplugged," Josh Kornbluth's comic monologue about his investigation of a hole in Franklin's famous autobiography. . . . ¶ Jan. 20-24 at 8:30: "Jaywalker," native New Yorker Marga Gomez's one-woman comedy about life in Los Angeles. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

The Shaughraun—The nineteenth-century playwright Dion Boucicault's melodrama, staged by the Irish Repertory Theatre. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Jan. 24.)

Side Man—Warren Leight's astute, elegiac play is a young man's bittersweet homage to his crazy, warring parents and to the mysteries of the jazz life that divided them. The father (played by Frank Wood with superb passive-aggressive vacancy), a big-band trumpet player, speaks articulately in his art but is a kind of zombie at home, which bewilders his son (a charming, laid-back Christian Slater) and drives his wife (Edie Falco) to drink. The son serves as a biographer of sorts, whose combined detachment from and involvement in the family is mirrored by the director Michael Mayer's expert staging, as he moves in and out of remembered scenes, alternately commenting on and participating in their chaos. (11/23/98) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

So, I Killed A Few People—From Chicago's Annoyance Theatre, a black comedy, written by Gary Ruderman and David Summers, in which a convicted serial killer's last request is to stage a one-man show. Performed by Mr. Summers. (The Piano Store, 158 Ludlow St., at Stanton St. 420-1466.)

Some Voices—The British playwright Joe Penhall's comedy-drama about a restaurant owner who takes in his schizophrenic brother, presented by the New Group. Frank Pugliese is the director. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200. Closes Feb. 6.)

Stop Kiss—Diana Son's modern tragicomedy, about two heretofore heterosexual young women (Jessica Hecht and Sandra Oh) falling in love in New York, is a small wonder. The fine production shifts back and forth seamlessly between scenes that lead up to the friends' first kiss and scenes that follow it, in the aftermath of a brutal, bias-inspired assault. It's a sweet dream and a nightmare at once, a juxtaposition that makes both sides of life seem more resonant. Ms. Hecht stands out in the first-rate cast. Jo Bonney directed. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Jan. 31.)

Swan Lake—The British choreographer Matthew Bourne's thrilling, iconoclastic version of the Tchaikovsky ballet takes the story of the troubled Prince who falls in love with a swan out of the realm of the folkloric and into the realm of Freudian nightmare, where obsession substitutes for enchantment. The simple but profound exchange of male for female swans sweeps away in one stroke the hidebound froufrou of the traditional version and releases enormous energy into the music. (10/19/98) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 23.)

Symphonie Fantastique—Basil Twist's abstract underwater puppets, set to the music of Berlioz. A peerless, delightful evening. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

Wang Dang—Tom Noonan wrote, directed, and stars in a play about a has-been filmmaker guest-lecturing at a small college. (Paradise Theatre, 64 E. 4th St. 253-8107. Closes Feb. 14.)

Whoa-Jack!—Büchner's "Woyzeck" is transplanted to the American South of the sixties, in a jazz-accompanied adaptation by Jeff Cohen. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 604-4195. Closes Feb. 7.)

Wit—Margaret Edson's black comedy about an English professor (Kathleen Chalfant) dying of ovarian cancer, who finds solace in the sonnets of John Donne. An MCC Theatre production, directed by Derek Anson Jones. (1/18/99) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

LONG RUNS

ART: Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE SOUND OF MUSIC:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **TITANIC:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—Jan. 20 at 8: "Fanfare," "Les Gentilhommes," and "Union Jack." . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8: "Variations on a Nursery Song," "Chiaroscuro," "Herman Schmerman," and "Symphonic Dances." . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 8: "2 & 3 Part Inventions," "Walton Cello Concerto," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 2: "Les Gentilhommes," "Herman Schmerman," "Opus 19/The Dreamer," and "Cortège Hongrois." . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 8: "Fanfare," "Liebeslieder Walzer," and "Symphonic Dances." . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 3: "Chiaroscuro," "Glazounov Pas de Deux," "2 & 3 Part Inventions," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Herman Schmerman," "Walton Cello Concerto," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through Feb. 28.)

EIFMAN BALLET OF ST. PETERSBURG—The thirty-three-member troupe performs four programs, one a pair of plotless works ("Requiem" and "My Jerusalem") and three full-length story ballets (a version of "The Brothers Karamazov" and biographical treatments of Tchaikovsky and Olga Spessivtseva), all choreographed by Boris Eifman, formerly of the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Jan. 19-22 and Jan. 26 at 8, Jan. 23 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 24 at 2. Through Jan. 31.)

TORONTO DANCE THEATRE—The dozen modern dancers of the thirty-one-year-old company present new and repertory works by James Kudelka ("The Provincial Suite," a sendup of ballet's version of peasant dance), Mitch Kirsch ("Good Vibes,"), and artistic director Christopher House, whose choreography is presented in "Schubert Dances," "Fjeld," and "Vena Cava." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Jan. 19-22 at 8, Jan. 23 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 24 at 2 and 7:30.)

"SOMEWHERE IN THE DREAM"—The Dorothy Jungels/Everett Dance Theatre creates surprisingly funny full-length treatments of big, provocative themes—earlier works have taken on the birth of aviation and the dignity of labor in the Northeast. The company is well situated for its next topic, the plight of public education: its headquarters are across the street from Hope High, a performing-arts magnet school in Providence (six of the eight company members are graduates). Much of this new work proceeds from the question "What would happen if movement were the language of the schools?" For example, to answer a query in history class—"Who made up the K.K.K. outfits?"—students form a tap-dance line in white hoods; in a lesson on Hitler, they copy poses he struck in photographs. Throughout the work, the company tumbles over movable sections of playground fence which also serve as suggestive sets: the ghetto, the forest in a comically multi-culti version of "Giselle," the Khmer Rouge refugee camp in which a Cambodian student turns his life story into club dance. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Jan. 19-23 at 8.)

"SCRAWL"—The dancer and choreographer Lance Gries collaborates with lighting designer David Fritz and scenarist Peter Melville in an evening-length suite of solos and duets inspired by Gries's investigation of portrait studies. The Belgian dancer Florence Augendre also performs. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Jan. 21-24 at 8:30.)

FLAMENCO LATINO—The Bronx-based company presents a blend of salsa and flamenco choreography. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Jan. 21-23 at 8 and Jan. 24 at 3.)

DONNY GOLDEN IRISH DANCERS—The Brooklyn-based company presents jigs, reels, hornpipes, and step dances, in the opening of Town Hall's world-dance series. (123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Jan. 22 at 8.)

"BLUE PLATE SPECIAL"—In the title work, Amy Drum, Daniel Gwirtzman, and Lynn Neuman of Artichoke Dance Company serve up a collaborative goulash of dance styles—hip-hop, buck dancing, vogueing, flamenco, et al.—set to a fiddle score by Oliver Schroer and the Stewed Tomatoes. Four other works, created individually by company members,

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are also on the program. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 334-7479. Jan. 21-24 at 8.)

"Vaudeville 2000"—Buster Brown, Marion Coles, Brenda Bufalino, Karen Zebulon, the Young Hoofers, the Tap Tramps, and a host of other hoofers present signature routines, classic thirties pieces, song-and-dance satires, improvisations, and tap premières. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Jan. 21-23 at 7:30 and Jan. 24 at 3 and 7:30. Through Jan. 31.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

The Carnegie Hall Jazz Band—The première of Duke Ellington's long-form concert piece "Black, Brown and Beige," a musical portrait of African-American history, performed at his first Carnegie Hall concert, in 1943, didn't sit right with every critic in the house—artistic ambition of this size was supposed to be beyond the ken of a jazzman. Nearly sixty years later, the individual beauties of this sprawling, melodious work are easier to isolate and enjoy; in fact, "Come Sunday" has become one of Ellington's most beloved tunes. Carrie Smith will have the honor of singing that miniature masterpiece alongside the expert Carnegie Hall Jazz Band. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Jan. 21 at 8.)

Roland Hanna—One of the giants of Detroit's fertile piano delta, Hanna is an Ellington scholar, a crackerjack blues player, and a knight of the Liberian government. An open-armed stylist who can be as fastidious as he is funky, he remains delightfully beyond categorization. (Kaplan Penthouse, 165 W. 65th St. 875-5599. Jan. 21-22 at 8.)

Jazz at the Y—Pianist Dick Hyman and trumpeter Joe Wilder, staples of the 92nd Street Y swing galas, are joined by pianist Dwike Mitchell and French hornist and bassist Willie Ruff, who are welcome new faces. This venerable partnership has been around since the fifties, when their spirited sophistication caught the ears of two other discerning partners, Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 23 at 8.)

Ladysmith Black Mambazo—The great South African a-cappella group, best known for its work on Paul Simon's "Graceland." (Center for the Arts, College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd., Staten Island. 718-982-2787. Jan. 23 at 8.)

Michael Feinstein—The singer, pianist, and raconteur. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Jan. 25 at 8.)

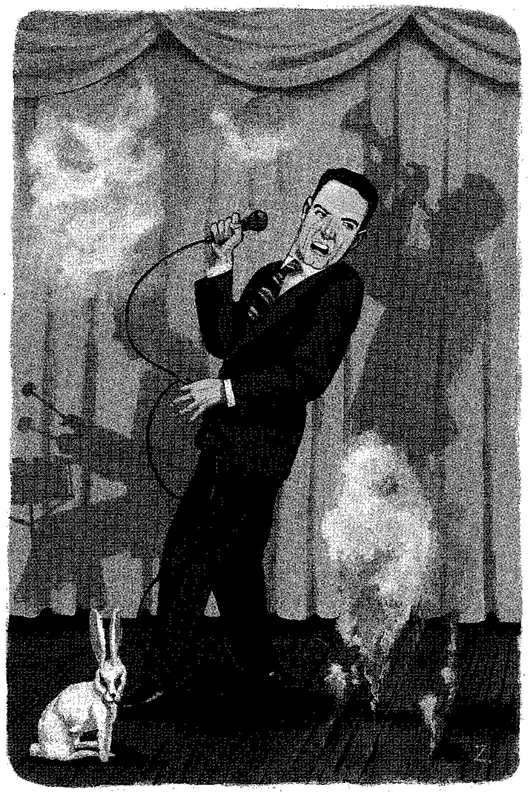
"Women in Music: 1960-1999"—A four-decade, folk-heavy salute to ladies who sing, featuring tree-hugging poet and pop star Jewel, Grammy-winning cowboy hunter Paula Cole, and their spiritual godmother, Judy Collins, who was softly strumming her guitar when Jewel was making snow angels in the tundra. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Jan. 25 at 7.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Jan. 20-23: **PAT MARTINO & JOYOUS LAKE.** His iconic stature now firmly etched in stone, this sleek and thoughtful guitarist has refined the knowledge and experience of four decades' worth of playing into a signature poetic sound. Jan. 26: The **MARIA SCHNEIDER JAZZ ORCHESTRA.** Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Jan. 24: As life gets faster, **B. B. KING** at seventy-three continues to take it slow. His guitar playing has evolved into a ritual, each note massaged into an ecstatic sheen. His voice, happily ruined from years of touring, sounds like an invitation to testify. Who said the blues were depressing? Dining.



The Billy Nayer Show, at Brownies.

ZOHAR LAZAR

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, the amazing **EARTHA KITT.** In a black velvet dress slit nearly to her navel, Kitt slinks about the stage, toying with the audience the way a tiger might paw its prey. Men are her victims, and when she fixes her opal eyes on the saps in the front row and stares until their egos are slashed there are those who actually cry out for help. She's relentless and pitiless and, at seventy-two years old, yet to be tamed. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **PETER MINTUN** is in attendance.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Jan. 24: With each cascading phrase, Cuban pianist **GONZALO RUBALCABA** reminds us that we have Fidel Castro to thank for the presence here of such rampant virtuosity. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.** Dining.

Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through Jan. 24: **BILLY HIGGINS AND THE TRUE-BLUE ALL STARS.** There's not a single recording on the Blue Note label credited solely to Higgins, yet this sublime drummer has as much right to represent that classic label as, say, Joe Henderson. Smilin' Billy can light up a room with just the sound of his purring ride cymbal. He's as fine a drummer as jazz has ever seen, and he's been playing at a peak level that belies his recent health problems. Joining him are Blue Note alumni Curtis Fuller on trombone, saxophonist James Spaulding (another label pinch-hitter who never recorded his own album), and pianist Ronnie Matthews.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 20: In leading his own band, Jagged Sky, **DREW GRESS** carries over the same smarts and sharp musicianship that he brings to his usual role as bassist for such disparate players as Fred Hersch, Tim Berne, and Andy Laster's Hydra. Jan. 23: **LEON PARKER.** The daring and imaginative Parker may be the most interesting jazz drummer to surface in years, but jazz is often the last thing on his mind. On his own recordings ("Awakening" is the latest), Parker investigates the music and percussion instruments of various ethnic groups with as much zeal as he has shown for outright swing in his work with others, notably pianist Jacky Terrasson. Which path Parker will take and what company he's keeping are tantalizing questions that make this engagement worth checking out.

Tonic, 107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Who would have ever imagined that the antic cut-and-paste aesthetician **JOHN ZORN** (Jan. 21-23) would one day embrace his Jewish roots, mate klezmer with the improvisatory ploys of Ornette Coleman, and go on to organize the freshest and most openly emotive jazz ensemble of the day? Masada, with Zorn on alto and drummer Joey Baron, trumpeter Dave Douglas, and bassist Greg Cohen, is disciplined and unfettered, sombre and joyous—qualities the group has in common, come to think of it, with both klezmer and the music of Ornette Coleman.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Jan. 24: The **SHERMAN IRBY** quartet. Altoist Irby isn't going to make you forget Charlie Parker, but he does have the kind of wide-open emotionalism that goes with youthful vigor. The tugging throb in his tone is a sign that he's in for the long haul. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Zinc Bar, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—A young guitarist with flying fingers and a heart filled with bebop, **RON AFFIF** has a regular Monday gig at an intimate space that caters to guitar freaks—just right for a six-string whiz with almost too much to say. Saturdays feature Brazilian jazz.

ROCK, ETC.

Arlene Grocery, 95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (358-1633)—A narrow, dimly lit renovated bodega that's the ideal environment for three to five unknown bands a night struggling their way out of obscurity.

Baggot Inn, 82 W. 3rd St. (477-0622)—"Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk" may have closed, but the beat goes on. The back room of this West Village bar is home on Sunday nights to Raymond King, Darly Dove, Jr., and Larry Wright, the musicians who created the onstage percussion for the Broadway show. King and his friends bang away on pots and pans, chairs, plastic buckets, and drums. The sticks fly. Sweat drenches their shirts. Just a few feet from the flurry, you hold on to your drink with both hands, mesmerized.

Blarney Star, 43 Murray St. (732-2873)—Home to fine Irish music every Friday night.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Jan. 23: **STEVE FORBERT.** This folk-rock troubadour from Meridian, Mississippi, can always be counted on to offer a solid live show, and when he sings one of his full-bodied songs about love and loss his fans will have the pleasure of thinking, Yes—exactly.

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Jan. 22: **JOE MC INTYRE,** formerly of the New Kids on the Block. Jan. 23: The seminal post-punk quartet **SUPERCHUNK,** featuring singer-guitarist Mac McCaughan (who also heads a more introspective solo project called Portastatic). Jan. 26: **SINÉAD LOHAN.** There's no reason to have heard of this singer-songwriter from Cork, though she was on the bill of Lilith Fair and she's got Joan Baez's manager. But her début album was a huge success at home, and the lyrical sounds of her first United States release, "No Mermaid," are reason enough to drop by.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Jan. 21: **THE BILLY NAYER SHOW.** Cory McAbee, the lead singer of this San Francisco combo with a Left Coast cult following, dresses in dark suits and hits the stage like a schizophrenic G-man. He can be collected

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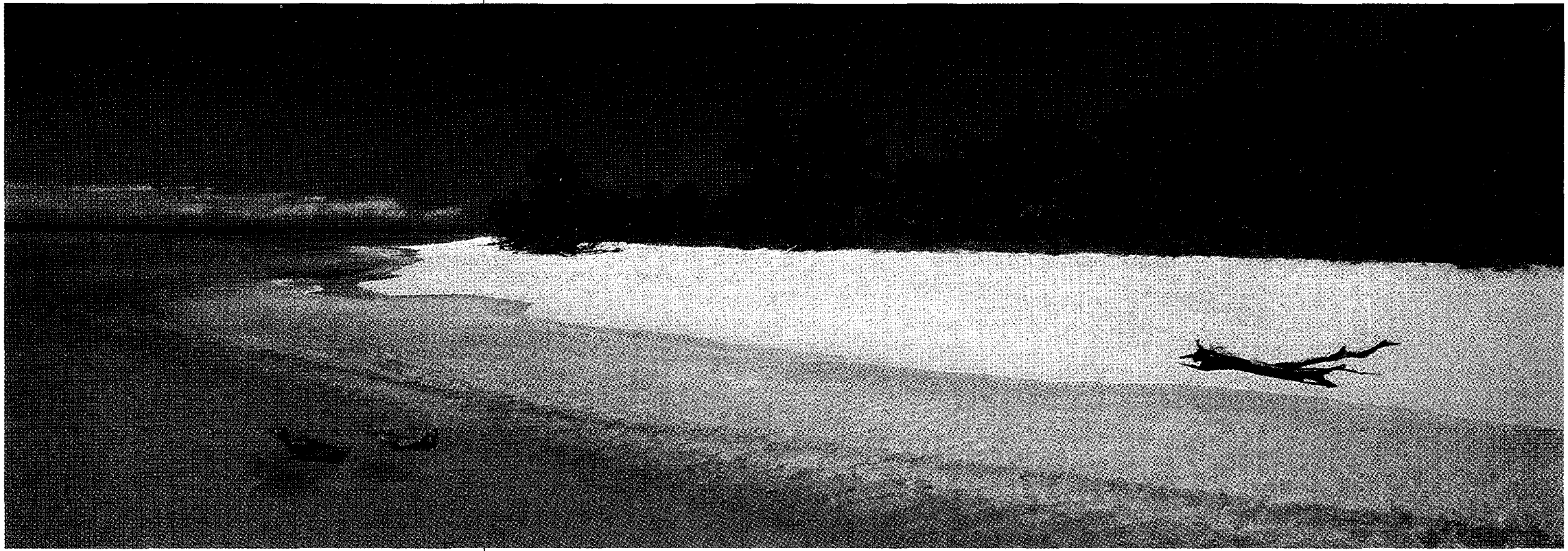

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and calm, but then he's howling, ferreting out clues about love and longing. On the group's latest album, "The Villain that Love Built," he hits such lines as "My legs get very sweaty when I sleep alone at night" and "She's got the things I need, but how long will I need them?" with an honesty that cuts to the truth of the matter: there's no escaping some vulgarity. It would be ugly if McAbee didn't have such style. With the minimalist art rock of **GIANT FINGERS.**

CONTINENTAL, 25 Third Ave., at St. Marks Pl. (529-6924)—Hipsters, punks, poseurs, N.Y.U. students, the occasional skinhead—a typical East Village bar. Live music nightly.

THE COOLER, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—Jan. 25: **BARBEZ,** a local combo featuring an accordionist and a Continental, post-punk loungy sound.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 26: The **CANDY BUTCHERS.** Fronted by songwriter-guitarist Mike Viola, this excellent Beatle-esque local act has performed both as a duo (guitar and drums) and as a seven-piece combo complete with cello and horn section.

MAXWELL'S, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Jan. 25: **SUPERCHUNK.** (See the Bowery Ballroom.)

S.O.B.'S, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Jan. 25: The timbales king **TITO PUENTE** was there when Latin music gained a foothold in the American consciousness back in the late forties, he stuck by it through the lean years, and, with the music's resurgence, he's still here, whipping dancers into a frenzy. Dining.

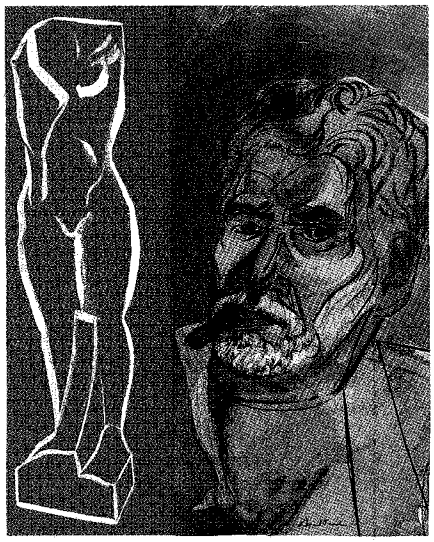
ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Anselm Kiefer: Works on Paper 1969-1993," a major exhibition presenting fifty-four drawings, watercolors, gouaches, and woodcuts acquired by the museum in 1995. Through March 21. . . . ¶ "Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara." Through March 28. . . . ¶ "Cubism and Fashion." Through March 14. . . . ¶ "Donato Creti: Melancholy and Perfection" showcases an early-eighteenth-century painter (1671-1749), the last in a line of Bolognese classicists. Through Jan. 31. . . . ¶ "Charles Burchfield from the Collection," a survey of the museum's holdings of this great, eccentric American painter (1893-1967). Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ "Félix Vallotton: Woodcuts and Three Paintings." Through Feb. 21. . . . ¶ "Mary Cassatt: Drawings and Prints in the Met," a selection of more than fifty works on paper from the museum's collections. Through Jan. 24. . . . ¶ "Jade of Ancient Costa Rica" presents more than a hundred pendants, mace heads, ear ornaments, and beads, exquisitely carved with designs of birds, bats, and angry gods and polished to a high gloss. One of the most puzzling objects is an Olmec pendant with a stylized representation of a cat-headed insect being gripped by an elegant hand—an image unique in Mesoamerican art. Through Feb. 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Jackson Pollock," a comprehensive retrospective—the first in the United States since 1967—of the artist many regard as the most influential American painter of this century. It would be hard to fault the installation or the choice of works: in addition to many smaller drawings and canvases, the Modern has secured all of the major large pictures, from the mural that Peggy Guggenheim commissioned for her foyer in 1943 to the late "Blue Poles" (1952). Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Focus: Pollock and Printmaking." Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Dubuffet to de Kooning: Expressionist Prints from Europe and America." Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Structure and Surface: Contemporary Japanese Textiles." Through Jan. 26. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 6; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:30.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Rendezvous: Masterpieces from the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Guggenheim Museums" includes works by Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Kandinsky, and other modern masters. Through Jan. 24. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)



IDÉE FIXE: *There are many signature elements in the art of the Bay Area sculptor Manuel Neri—rough, immediate construction; a tendency to add paint to his sculptures; an appealing contrast of muscular handling and sensitivity to form. Then there is his long-standing interest—one might say fixation—on the female nude. As with Picasso, the artist's life seems to have paralleled his art: from 1953 to the present he has married four times, moving on with apparent amiability. Still, Neri's mocking description of himself as "just a Beat sculptor" looks like a smoke screen. His current show of nudes at the Cowles gallery reveals the mythic direction in which he was always headed. The austere figure drawings and totemic sculptures in marble, plaster, and bronze echo the techniques of earlier centuries: Degas's delicate line, Rodin's chiselled struggle of form with stone, the balanced frontal dignity of Egyptian busts. In one painted bronze, a woman steps forward simply, as if from the walls of Pompeii.*

DAVID TOMB

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The Duane Hanson (1925-96) retrospective brings together a comprehensive selection of the artist's amazingly realistic re-creations of middle-class Americans: life-size casts of construction workers, a tough-looking cop, a weary maid, a bored flea-market vender. The use of actual clothing and objects completes the illusion; in "Man on a Lawn Mower," finished shortly before the artist's death, and exhibited for the first time here, the figure is seated on a tractor, clutching a can of soda. The tone of ironic condescension, however faint, sometimes overpowers the work: it can be difficult, even on the second or third glance, to distinguish the real tacky tourist from the sculptured tacky tourist, and the viewer is left with only the technique to admire (it is, admittedly, mighty impressive). Whatever you do, don't stand still. Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ "Ray Johnson: Correspondences" chronicles the work of the founder of the "New York Correspondence School," one of the earliest examples of the mail-art movement. Through March 21. . . . ¶ An exhibition of fifty-two Brice Marden drawings. Through March 28. . . . ¶ "Pale Guide to Transparent Things," an exhibition of photographs by Seton Smith. Through April 4. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter" offers some four hundred examples of lepidoptera in a specially constructed vivarium. Through Feb. 28. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch," an exhibition of a hundred large-scale court and religious paintings, manuscripts, and enamels done in the representational style that flourished under the dynasty that ruled Iran from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Through Jan. 24. . . . ¶ "Domestic Transformations: Working in Brooklyn" features paintings and sculptures by borough residents Ann Agee, Ron Baron, Jean Blackburn, and Andy Yoder. Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GROLIER CLUB, 47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—"A Treasure-House of Books: The Library of Duke August of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel" presents printed material and manuscripts from the personal collection of the dedicated bibliophile, including a ninth-century illuminated gospel from Tours and a presentation copy of the "Theuerdank," a poem commissioned by Emperor Maximilian to mark his successful courtship of Maria of Burgundy. Through Feb. 6. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

MORRIS GRAVES—A group of floral paintings on paper, from the seventies, ranging from the fresh and charming to the cloying (a single daisy peeks up from the corner of an oblong, claw-footed box), is paired with a recent suite called "The Five Seasons." The usual four are represented by symbols, conventional and enigmatic (spring is a spray of flowers, summer a stack of rocks). The fifth, "All Seasons," shows a glass jar emanating pure white light. Through Jan. 30. (Schmidt-Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122.)

CHRIS MACDONALD—A playful series of oil-crayon drawings of construction sites, with trucks, steamrollers, and backhoes rendered as vividly colored blobs scattered across a black ground. The musical effect, reminiscent of Stuart Davis's jazzy tributes to New York, is somewhat vitiated by Macdonald's random compositions. Through Feb. 20. (Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St. 535-8810.)

WILLIAM WOOD / "SURREALIST DRAWINGS"—Mysterious abstract patterns, suavely executed in a waxy medium, reproducing the modulated grays of a black-and-white photograph. They seem to depict real but normally invisible phenomena—microscopic views of blood corpuscles, an astronomer's enhancement of cosmic radio waves—with a mechanical mindlessness that gives blandness a distinctly creepy edge./A small, well-chosen group of drawings—by Ossorio, Tanguy, Matta, Tchelitchew, and a fine, loose Dali pencil drawing of Salome, from 1937—hangs in the back gallery, to underline Wood's debt to Surrealist dreamscapes. Unfortunately, Wood's versions pale in comparison. Through Feb. 13. (Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227.)

"Epic Painting"—Three monumental abstract paintings from the nineteen-seventies dominate the main gallery. Adolph Gottlieb's "Triptych" reads like a Chinese landscape scroll, with bursts of black blots balanced against an atmospheric expanse; at nineteen feet, it was the largest painting he ever produced. There is also a profoundly tranquillizing field painting by Richard Pousette-Dart, "White Silence," a network of shimmering pointillistic brushstrokes, and a rather blunt Motherwell. In the small gallery are some preparatory drawings for the paintings, including a perfect little watercolor of "Triptych." Through Jan. 30. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550.)

"River Scenes of France"—Paintings and drawings by many of the greatest (and some of the lesser-known) Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Among the treasures are a witty pen-and-ink drawing by Seurat of a lady in a bustle, fishing, sketched on the back of an envelope; an exquisite painting by Caillebotte of the Seine, a rural landscape that glows with light; and an outstanding Monet of the village of Vêtheul at sundown, glistening with gold. The exhibit also includes first-rate work by Courbet, Pissarro, Sisley, and Boudin, as well as a large number of Parisian scenes by a painter named Albert Marquet, including a fine view of Notre Dame in the snow. Through Feb. 6. (Wildenstein, 19 E. 64th St. 879-0500. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

Short List—**BRUNO ANDRADE,** MB Modern, 41 E. 57th St. 371-3444. Through Jan. 30. . . . **RICHARD BAKER,** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780. Through Feb. 13. . . . **JENNIFER BARTLETT,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through March 13. . . . **SUSANNA COFFEY,** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050. Through Feb. 6. . . . **HENRY DARGER,** Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734. Through March 13. . . . **ELAINE DE KOONING,** Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606. Open Mondays; through Jan. 30. . . . **WILLIAM DUNLAP,** Hirschl & Adler, 21 E. 70th St. 535-8810. Through Jan. 30. . . . **ROBERT LA HOTAN,** Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730. Through Feb. 6. . . . **DAMIAN LOEB,** Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through Feb. 13. . . . **MARK MAHOSKY,** Rickards, 1045 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 924-0858. Through Feb. 20. . . . **STEVEN MC CALLUM,** Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 987-4997. Through Feb. 20. . . . **JOE NAUJOKAS,** Perlow, 41 E. 57th St. 644-7171. Through Feb. 4. . . . **GLENN PRIESTLEY,** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. Through Feb. 3. . . . **ROBERT RYMAN,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through Feb. 6. . . . **KEITH SONNIER** and **VINCENT DESIDERIO,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; both shows through Feb. 13. . . . **MAX WEBER,** Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545. Through Feb. 20. . . . **LAWRENCE WEINER,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Through Feb. 20.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

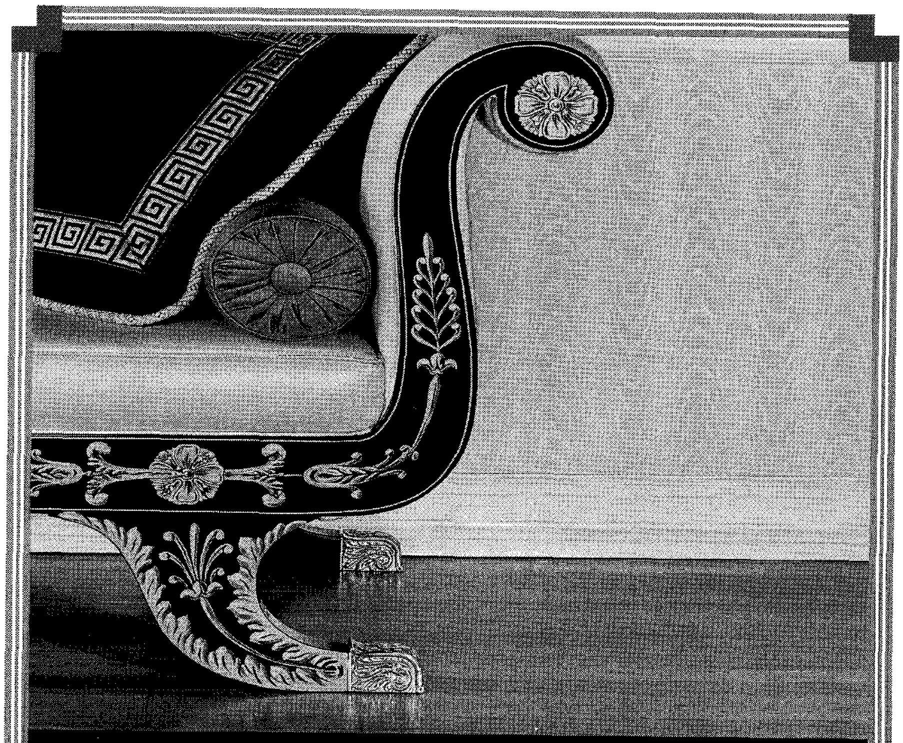
Scott Reeder—Paintings and sculptures that straddle the line between the two genres. When in the early sixties Donald Judd called for new art forms—he called them "specific objects"—that would embody such a dissolution of genres, he could not have imagined works like Reeder's. The artist's palette tends toward washes of pastels, and there is a dreamy "Romper Room" aspect to the works. Pale-blue thought bubbles or clouds are stacked against a wall with self-conscious informality; an aqueous abstraction resolves itself in a quasi-sculptural puddle on the floor. The pictures are pretty, or wanly humorous, such as one depicting a pirate. Who says you can't win on charm? Through Feb. 27. (Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366.)

Rudolf Stingel—A suite of dreary sculptures by an artist who has previously turned out some sparkling mixed-medium installations. These radiator grilles cast in aluminum have an appearance of extreme decrepitude. Perhaps Stingel, having created works of such effervescent prettiness in the past, wished to demonstrate that he could work his hand at ugliness just as well. Through Feb. 13. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

Short List—**DAVID DUPUIS,** Eller, 529 W. 20th St. 206-6411. Through Feb. 6. . . . **TONY FITZPATRICK,** Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318. Through Jan. 30. . . . **RAINER GANAHL,** Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999. Through Jan. 30. . . . **DIEGO GRAVINESE,** De Chiara Stewart, 521 W. 26th St. 967-6007. Through Feb. 14. . . . **AMY HILL,** Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Through Feb. 20. . . . **NINA KATCHADOURIAN,** Debs, 529 W. 20th St. 647-7080. Through Feb. 13. . . . **JOHN KIRCHNER,** Foster, 529 W. 20th St. 966-9024. Through Feb. 13. . . . **MICAH LEXIER** and **JONATHAN SELIGER,** Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701. Both shows through Feb. 6. . . . **TAM OCHIAI** and **STEVEN PARRINO,** Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219. Both shows through Jan. 30. . . . **ALBERT OEHLEN,** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100. Through Feb. 27. . . . **ALIX PEARLSTEIN** and **MICHAEL BALLOU,** Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 727-3323. Both shows through Feb. 6. . . . **WILLIAM STEIGER,** Thatcher, 529 W. 20th St. 675-0222. Through Feb. 6. . . . **MICHAEL TIMPSON** and **ELLEN HARVEY,** Stux, 529 W. 20th St. 352-1600. Both shows through Feb. 13.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Inka Essenhigh / Tom Shannon—Essenhigh makes large-scale paintings with slick enamel surfaces. Floating through them are any number of representational homunculi, and many seem to have strayed out of Japani-



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mation. The artist's works belong to that now capacious stream of tendency toward fantastic yet obscure narratives. / Shannon's sculpture "Serene in Suspense" is a life-size realization of a nude woman suspended in space, hanging by a thin cord. Apparently, a magnet in her head aligns her with the North Pole. We should all be so serene yet so directed. Both shows through Feb. 13. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

Frances Stark—Works on paper, some incorporating elements such as photographs or a sheet of Mylar. Stark's drawings initially appear to be an abstract series of repeated letters drawn through carbon paper, but they often have a "key," so that with careful attention one can discern quotations from Robert Musil and Daniel Buren. Those who do not wish to engage in such heavy labor, however, may simply admire their delicacy. Through Feb. 6. (C.R.G., 93 Grand St. 966-4360.)

"North and South Connected"—A small but important show outlining affinities both subtle and strong between some postwar abstract artists and the pre-Columbian civilizations. In some cases, it's a matter of direct quotation: a small, vividly colored grid painting by Alfred Jensen makes enigmatic use of the numbering system of the Maya; an exquisite weaving by Anni Albers (Josef's wife) is fringed with braided string, suggestive of quipu, the system of knots used by the Incas for cross-country communication. Other connections are more oblique, as in the hieroglyph-like images of a classic painting by Adolph Gottlieb. The twentieth-century works here are well chosen, but the ancient Peruvian textiles are magnificent. Through Jan. 30. (Torres, 140 Greene St. 431-5869.)

Short List—**peter flaccus,** Knowlton, 568 Broadway. 966-2625. Through Feb. 20. . . . **ben katchor,** Bronfman Center, 7 E. 10th St. 998-4114. Through Feb. 28. . . . **tony matelli,** Basilico Fine Arts, 26 Wooster St. 966-1831. Through Feb. 13. . . . **paul mc carthy and jason rhoades,** Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through Feb. 13. . . . **takashi murakami,** Boesky, 51 Greene St. 941-9888. Through Feb. 18. . . . **manuel neri,** Cowles, 420 West Broadway. 925-3500. Through Jan. 30. . . . **roxy paine,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through Feb. 13. . . . **judy pfaff,** McCready, 425 W. 13th St. 243-0439. Through Feb. 27. . . . **peter plagens,** Hoffman, 429 West Broadway. 966-6676. Through Jan. 27. . . . **david rabinowitch,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through Feb. 5. . . . **roger shimomura,** Steinbaum Krauss, 132 Greene St. 431-4224. Through Feb. 13. . . . **sandy skoglund,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Feb. 13. . . . **jordan tinker,** Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455. Through Feb. 27.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Jan. 20: Pottery, paintings, silver, and other decorative pieces created for the Chinese export market. . . . ¶ Jan. 22: Fine English furniture and decorations. . . . ¶ Jan. 23: An auction of fine and collectible wines, most of them from a single, immaculately maintained cellar, including historic vintages of Bordeaux *premiers crus* (including hundred-year-old bottles of Mouton and Lafite) and twenty-six vintages of Yquem (reaching deep into the nineteenth century). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Joel Sachs directs the opening of the Focus! 1999 festival, at Juilliard.

HOWARD COALE

Christie's—An auction of British furniture (including a selection of Irish pieces) and decorative works. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000. Jan. 21.)

Phillips—Jan. 21: A sale of American and European furniture, silver, and decorative art, including a curious assemblage of miniature furniture from the nineteenth century, built as apprentice pieces or tradesman samples. . . . ¶ Jan. 26: Rare stamps and philatelic covers. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830.)

Swann—Vintage posters. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Jan. 28.)

Winter Antiques Show—The concluding days of the forty-fifth year of this prestigious affair, in which international exhibitors complement the core of the show—Stateside dealers of Americana. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Jan. 20-24. For information, call 718-292-7392. . . . **note:** A selection of items from the New York State Historical Association—not for sale—is on display throughout the show.)

Outsider Art Fair—The preëminent show of works by artists who are self-taught or who in some manner march to a different drummer. (Puck Building, Lafayette St. at Houston St. Jan. 22-24, with a benefit preview on Jan. 21. For information, call 777-5218.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

"Naked"—Photo-based works by Elinor Carucci, Gerald Slota, Jayne Hinds Bidaut, Michael Martone, and others. Through March 6. (Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819.)

International Center of Photography—Shadowy black-and-white pictures, from the summer of 1959, of the Jokers, a Brooklyn gang of tight-T-shirt-wearing, tattooed hoodlums (by today's standards they look clean-cut), all tough and indisputably cool; none appear miffed by a photographer shooting them at their regular haunts—Prospect Park, Helen's Candy Store, underneath the Coney Island boardwalk. Through March 7. . . . ¶ "Intimate City: The Photographs of Thomas Roma." Through March 7. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

International Center of Photography Midtown—"Man Ray: Photography and Its Double," a large show of works from the artist's archives, which are housed at the Pompidou Center, in Paris. Through Jan. 24. (Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Short List—**bruce barnbaum,** Witkin, 415 West Broadway. 925-5510. Through Feb. 20. . . . **martin chambí** and **désiré charnay,** Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St. 223-1059. Through Feb. 6. . . . **bruce cratsley,** Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays; through Feb. 14. . . . **william eggleston,** Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Feb. 27. . . . **elgar esser,** Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160. Through Feb. 13. . . . **neil folberg,** AlanKlotz/Photocollect, 22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211. Closed Tuesdays; through Feb. 20. . . . **franz hubmann** and **erika hubatschek,** Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; both shows through Feb. 20. . . . **peter hujar and david wojnarowicz,** P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Through Feb. 6. . . . **kenro izu,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through Jan. 23. . . . **george krause,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Jan. 23. . . . **laura larson,** Kirkland, 504 W. 22nd St. 627-3930. Through Feb. 27. . . . **d. w. mellor** and **josef sudek,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Both shows through Feb. 20. . . . **walter niedermayr,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through Feb. 6. . . . **nicholas nixon,** Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through Jan. 23. . . . **charles pratt,** Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223. Through Jan. 23.

(See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; for the Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St., 749-2802, ext. 428; and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**lucia di lammermoor,** with Elizabeth Futral, Ramón Vargas, Anthony Michaels-Moore, and Paul Plishka; conducted by Gareth Morrell. (Jan. 20 at 8.) . . . With Ruth Ann Swenson, Mr. Vargas, Haijing Fu, and Alastair Miles; Carlo Rizzi. (Jan. 23 at 8.) . . . **kátya kabanová,** by Janáček, with Catherine Malfitano, Judith Forst, Jane Bunnell, Peter Straka, Robert Brubaker, Matthew Polenzani, and Sergei Koptchak; Charles Mackerras. (Jan. 21 at 7:30.) . . . **la bohème,** with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Ainhoa Arteta, Frank Lopardo, Mr. Michaels-Moore, and David Pittsinger; Marco Armiliato. (Jan. 22 at 8 and Jan. 26 at 7:30.) . . . **werther,** in a version that Massenet prepared in order to bring the title role (conceived for a tenor) within the compass of a lyric baritone; with Rebecca Evans, Susan Graham, and Thomas Hampson; Donald Runnicles. (Jan. 23 at 1:30.) . . . **simon boccanegra,** by Verdi, with Karita Mattila, Plácido Domingo, and Alexandru Agache; James Levine. (Jan. 25 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

"Lotario"—A 1729 opera seria by Handel, in a semi-staged performance by students of the Manhattan School of Music. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 20 at 7:30. . . . Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music. Jan. 22 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—In his first appearance with the orchestra (strange to say), Riccardo Muti conducts Brahms's Serenade No. 1, four orchestral excerpts from Busoni's music for "Turandot," and Ravel's "Boléro." (Avery Fisher Hall. Jan. 20 at 7:30 and Jan. 21-23 at 8.)

Dallas Symphony Orchestra—At Carnegie Hall, Andrew Litton conducting. Jan. 22 at 8: Elgar's "Introduction and Allegro for Strings," Debussy's "La Mer," and Walton's oratorio "Belshazzar's Feast" (with baritone Alan Opie). . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 2: A family concert introducing the instruments of the orchestra.

Riverside Symphony—Stravinsky's "Danses Concertantes," Guus Janssen's "Zoek," Purcell's "King Arthur" Suite, and Bach's Concerto for Violin and Oboe, with George Rothman on the podium. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 23 at 8.)

London Symphony Orchestra—At Avery Fisher Hall, Colin Davis leads performances that anchor an Elgar mini-festival. Jan. 24 at 3: Elgar's "Introduction and Allegro for Strings" and his Cello Concerto (featuring Steven Isserlis), in addition to Beethoven's Symphony No. 7. . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 7:30: Elgar's "Serenade for Strings" and his "Enigma" Variations, as well as Beethoven's Symphony No. 6. . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 8: Elgar's

Symphony No. 1 plus Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (with Emanuel Ax). . . . NOTE: Elgar's chamber music is represented in the mini-festival through a performance of his Piano Quintet, with the Berlin Philharmonic Piano Quartet (violinist Nai-Yuan Hu assisting), in a concert that also includes Beethoven's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. Jan. 24 at 11 A.M. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.). . . ¶ NOTE, TOO: On Jan. 23 at 10 A.M., in the Rose Building's Kaplan Penthouse, Lincoln Center hosts an Elgar symposium involving several notable musicologists, open to anyone holding a ticket to any of the above four concerts.

Jupiter Symphony—Jens Nygaard conducts MacDowell's tone poems "Hamlet and Ophelia" and "Lancelot and Elaine," in addition to Ravel's G-Major Piano Concerto (with Ruth Laredo). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. Jan. 25 at 2 and 7 and Jan. 26 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

Baltimore Symphony Orchestra—David Zinman, the orchestra's conductor emeritus, leads Elgar's "Cockaigne" Overture, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with Radu Lupu), and a pop-inspired suite titled "Dance Mix," comprising movements by Christopher Rouse, David Schiff, Michael Daugherty, James Willey, and Aaron Jay Kernis. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 25 at 8.)

Philadelphia Orchestra—Simon Rattle conducts Sibelius's Symphony No. 5 and a concert performance of Act II from Janáček's opera "Jenůfa," featuring sopranos Roberta Alexander and Anja Silja and tenors Clifton Forbis and Gordon Gietz. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 26 at 8.)

RECITALS

Joseph Kalichstein—The pianist performs Schumann's "Kreisleriana" and Mendelssohn's "Fantasy in F-Sharp Minor" (also known as the "Sonate Écossaise"), in addition to three works that employ the enduring Renaissance tune "La Follia," by C. P. E. Bach, Liszt, and the modern Argentine composer Ezequiel Viñao. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 20 at 7:30.)

Il Seminario Musicale—The nine-member ensemble of voices and period instruments, directed by countertenor Gérard Lesne, offers cantatas and operatic excerpts by Nicolas Bernier, Sébastian de Brossard, Louis Nicolas Clérambault, and Handel; with soprano Rachel Elliott. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 20 at 8.)

Bargemusic—Oboist Douglas Boyd plays Britten's "Six Metamorphoses After Ovid"; violinist Carmit Zori, violist Scott St. John, and cellist Fred Sherry perform Beethoven's String Trio in G Major (Op. 9, No. 1); and all join for oboe quartets by Mozart and Britten. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Jan. 21 at 7:30 and Jan. 24 at 4.)

Trio Wanderer—A French piano trio, offering trios by Ravel, Rorem, and Copland (his "Vitebsk, Study on a Jewish Theme"). (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Jan. 21 at 8.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—The Swedish mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter and pianist Bengt Forsberg anchor a week's worth of recitals that focus on corners of the repertoire in which they have developed a specialty. Jan. 21 at 8: Works by Erich Wolfgang Korngold: his Suite for Two Violins, Cello, and Piano Left-Hand (Op. 23), his E-Major Piano Quintet, and several songs. . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: An all-French program comprising Ravel's "Introduction and Allegro" and "Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé," Messiaen's "Pièce" for piano and string quartet, Maurice Delage's "Quatre Poèmes Hindous," Gabriel Pierné's Cello Sonata (plus a group of his songs), and Fauré's song cycle "La Bonne Chanson" (here in the composer's version for voice, piano, and string quintet). (Alice Tully Hall. . . . NOTE: The final recital follows on Jan. 27.)

Ivory on Celluloid—Last spring, the Louvre curated a festival of filmed performances by legendary pianists of the century—dozens of them, some universally famous, all revered by pianophiles, brought together by editors into sixteen ninety-minute programs, each of which will be shown at Lincoln Center between Jan. 31 and Feb. 28. The series kicks off this week with the United States première of Bruno Monsaignon's 1998 documentary "Richter, the Enigma," a biographical film in two parts (each seventy-seven minutes long) about the late Sviatoslav Richter (who served as the film's narrator). (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. Jan. 22 at 6:15 and 9:30, with a screening of both halves at each seating. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.) . . . NOTE: Also this week, musical movie fans can check out Alan Miller's 1987 film "High Fidelity: The Adventures of the Guarneri String Quartet," with the filmmaker on hand to speak about his work. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Jan. 26 at 6.)

Gould Piano Trio—In its North American début recital, the British ensemble offers Beethoven's Trio No. 2, Frank Martin's "Fantasia on Irish Folk Melodies," Josef Suk's "Elegie," and Brahms's C-Major Trio. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. Jan. 22 at 8.)

Orion String Quartet—Performing works by Hindemith, Schumann, and Smetana. (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. Jan. 22 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Juilliard's Focus! 1999—This year's festival spotlights American music from the nineties; these opening concerts, at the Juilliard Theatre, are performed by the New Juilliard Ensemble. Jan. 22 at 8: Joel Sachs leads pieces by Samuel Adler, Tania León, Tan Dun, Roberto Sierra, David Lang, Chinary Ung, and Michael Torke. . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 2: The première of Charles Wuorinen's "Big Epithalamium," in addition to pieces by Mario Davidovsky, John Anthony Lennon, Drew Krause, John Zorn, Melissa Hui, Julia Wolfe, and Jon Deak. . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 8: Chamber music by Virko Baley, Derek Bermel, Michael Theodore, Milton Babbitt, Joan Tower, Francis Schwartz, and Dan

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Becker. . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 8: Chamber works by Steve Reich, Elliott Carter, Osvaldo Golijov, Robert Xavier Rodriguez, Walter Blanton, Marta Ptaszynska, and Joseph Klein (several of whom join Mr. Sachs for a pre-concert roundtable, open to ticket holders, at 7). (155 W. 65th St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406. The festival continues through Jan. 29.)

Sextet Pistols—Six bright young chamber players—violinists Ariel Shamai and Ann-Estelle Meduze, violists Ori Kam and Jethro Marks, and cellists Wolfram Koessel and Iris Regev—gather for a performance of Brahms's String Sextet No. 1. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Jan. 24 at noon.)

Christophe Prégardien—The tenor performs songs by Schumann (including his twelve Kerner lieder, Op. 35), Beethoven, Loewe, Schubert, and Wolf; with pianist Michael Gees. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 24 at 2.)

Tokyo String Quartet—The foursome plays quartets by Haydn, Beethoven, Wolf, and Webern. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. Jan. 24 at 2. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble—The St. Luke's Haydn Festival continues with a performance of his F-Major Cassation (Hob. II:20) and Symphony No. 44 (the "Trauersinfonie," played by an ensemble approximating the dimensions of the composer's own orchestra at the Esterházy court), in addition to pieces by two composers who worked in his orbit: a divertimento by Michael Haydn (his younger brother) and the D-Major Horn Concerto by Leopold Mozart. (Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway. Jan. 24 at 2. For information about tickets, call 212-594-6100.)

Peabody Trio—Performing Ravel's Piano Trio, Shulamit Ran's "Soliloquy," and, with clarinettist Charles Neidich assisting, Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time." (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Jan. 24 at 5.)

Organ Recitals—Aficionados of the King of Instruments will have to choose. Jan. 24 at 4:45: Bryan T. Campbell, playing works by Schumann, Henri Mulet, and others. (St. Patrick's Cathedral, Fifth Ave. at 51st St. No tickets necessary.) . . . Jan. 24 at 5: James E. Bobb, performing Bach's "Dorian" Toccata and Fugue and three of his Trios. (Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Central Park W. at 65th St. Admission by contribution.)

Rebecca Evans—Soprano, with pianist Craig Rutenberg, performing works by Mozart, Respighi, Bernstein, and others. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. Jan. 25 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Windscape—Performing chamber works by Debussy, Mozart, and Colin McPhee. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music. Jan. 25 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

"New Realities, Early Music"—At the Flea Theatre, concluding concerts in a series that spotlights performers with unorthodox approaches to early music. Jan. 25 at 8: Keri Mikkelson plays French and Italian Baroque harpsichord works. . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 8: Accordionist William Schimmel offers a staged "medieval rendition" of "Valley of the Dolls"—really! (41 White St., between Church St. and Broadway. For information about tickets, call 226-0051.)

Eugenia Zukerman and Anthony Newman—The flutist and the pianist present music and readings relating to the Russian Revolution. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 930-0571. Jan. 26 at 6.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

MODERN BRASS QUINTET: Four pieces by Poulenc, among other works. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. Jan. 20 at 6. No tickets necessary.) . . . **CHRISTIAN GERHAHER:** Baritone, singing German lieder. (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 20 at 8.) . . . **MOZART'S BIRTHDAY CONCERT:** Pushing the season by a week, with the Claring Chamber Players offering the composer's Divertimento in B-Flat Major (K. 287), some of his Horn Duets (K. 497), and his D-Major Divertimento for Strings (K. 136). (CAMI Hall, 165 W. 57th St. Jan. 20 at 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **JEANNE GOLAN:** Performing piano works by Barber, Granados, John Field, and Daron Hagen (a première). (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 21 at 8.) . . . **MUSICIANS ACCORD:** Chamber works by Stravinsky, Amy Rubin, Paul Hofreiter, and others. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. Jan. 20 at 8. Tickets at the door.) . . . **COSTAS COTSIOLIS:** Guitarist, performing works by Piazzolla, Leo Brouwer, and others. (Hubbard Recital Hall, Manhattan School of Music. Jan. 21 at 8.) . . . **CHAMBER MUSIC AT JUILLIARD:** Advanced students perform the String Quartet No. 4 by Artur Schnabel (remembered principally as a pianist, but an accomplished composer all the same), as well as Franck's Violin Sonata and Schumann's Piano Quintet. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 22 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.) . . . **MUSIC AT THE UKRAINIAN INSTITUTE:** Chamber works by Dohnányi, Yuriy Ishchenko, and Dvořák. (2 E. 79th St. 288-8660. Jan. 23 at 8.) . . . **RICHARD KOGAN:** Piano works by Beethoven and Debussy. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. Jan. 24 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **LUCIANA SOUZA:** Brazilian composer and vocalist, in conversation and concert. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 23 at 9.) . . . **HUSNU ONARAN:** Pianist, performing music by Mozart, Schubert, and Liszt. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 26 at 8.) . . . **MONOMOY CHAMBER ENSEMBLE:** Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio, Stravinsky's Octet, and Mozart's Serenade in E-Flat Major (K. 375). (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 26 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Winter Squash—By the end of this week, workers in Grand Central Terminal's waiting room will complete the construction of a thirty-two-by-twenty-one-foot squash court. Made of bullet-resistant Plexiglas, the court is going up for the DLJ Direct Tournament of Champions, which features fifty of the world's top squash players competing for more than eighty thousand dollars in prize money. Scotsman Peter Nicol, the world's top-ranked player, will be out to avenge last month's loss to Canadian Jonathan Power at the World Open Squash Championship, in Doha, Qatar. The top-ranked American player, Bostonian Mark Lewis (a hundred and sixth, worldwide), will try to make it out of the qualifying rounds. Spectators should expect healthy competition, according to John Nimick, the executive director of the Professional Squash Association. To win at squash, he says, "you beat your opponent to death—by that I mean you wear them out." (Jan. 23-28, from noon to 10. For more information, call 718-488-7764.)

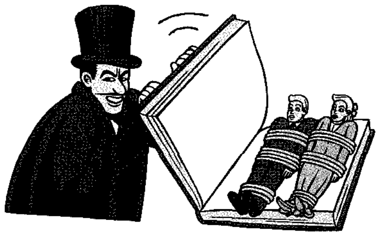
Readings—Jan. 20 at 7: By Michael Cunningham, from his novel "The Hours"; Mary Gaitskill, from her recent fiction; and Irini Spanidou, from her novel "Fear." (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 7:30: By Max Blagg, from his novel-in-progress, "Diving for Blondes." (S. J. South & Sons, 273 Church St. For more information, call 219-0640.) . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 7: By short-story writer Grace Paley and playwright Maria Irena Fornes, from recent work. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109.)

Talks—Jan. 26 at 6:30: *New Yorker* writer Lawrence Weschler presents a historical slide presentation about curiosity. The evening is based on "Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder," his book about a peculiar museum in Los Angeles. (Graduate School of Journalism Lecture Hall, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. For more information, call 998-2100.) . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 5:30: Kathryn D. Sullivan, the first American woman to walk in space, describes what it's like to fly on a space-shuttle mission. (Liberty Science Center, 251 Phillip St., Jersey City, N.J. 201-200-1000.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Evil, Inc.

TRUE villains—the Iagos, the Javerts, the Dr. Nos—are hard to find in fiction these days, since the bad guy tends to appear not in pure black but in ambiguous shades of gray. Still, a few genuine heavies have reared their heads recently, reminding us that sometimes the most seductive characters come in the form of unadulterated evil. It's a point well made in Marina Warner's scholarly **No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Making Mock** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), a historical analysis of the ogres and monsters who feed on (mostly children's) flesh—from the wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood" to Hannibal Lecter. "Bogeys make present what we dread," Warner observes, "and these fantasies include what we know we are capable of perpetrating ourselves."



In Naeem Murr's début novel, **The Boy** (Houghton Mifflin), an ambitious political scientist has an adulterous relationship with a female junkie he is hired to counsel. After she is murdered, he guiltily arranges to adopt their love child. The Boy sets about destroying his new family, seducing and later killing his half-sister, who, when she writes about him in her journal, is only marginally aware that she's describing the Devil: "Then he came out of the water, emerged with not a thought of his nakedness, for in a way he's always naked."

Bad Man Blues (Southern Methodist University), a collection of stories and essays by George Garrett, sounds as though it might follow the same appalling lines. But Garrett—a writer whose work has always glimmered with humanity—achieves a more transcendent end. In "The Pornographers," a deadbeat journalist bids adieu to a twelve-year-old porn star whose life he's been writing about: "And you, little blond girl with blue eyes . . . I wish you luck in all your adventures. One way or another we are all in the same line of work. The least we can do is admit it, from time to time, and hope for something better."

My War with Brian (N.B.M.), by the comic-book artist Ted Rall, chronicles the torment of the author's adolescence. Brian, a junior-high bully, beats Rall senseless for three years while adults advise him to "just ignore him—eventually he'll get bored and leave you alone." If only Othello had been given the same advice.

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

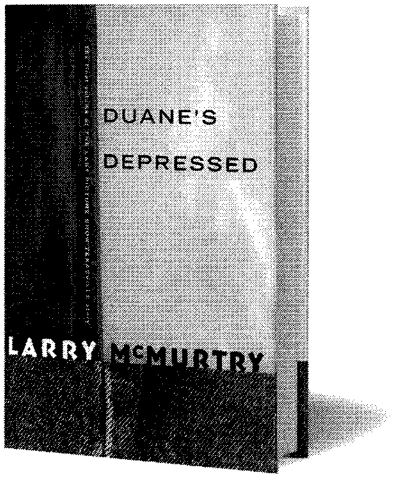
Books.
[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

The conclusion of
Larry McMurtry's
Texas Trilogy

DUANE'S DEPRESSED

From the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Lonesome Dove* and *Terms of Endearment* comes the long awaited final volume in the trilogy that began with *The Last Picture Show* and continued in *Texasville*. Full of true-to-life characters and finely tuned dialogue, it's the story of Duane Moore—working his way with humor and heartache through a late-life crisis. *Duane's Depressed* reconfirms that McMurtry is a powerful artist with a sure touch for the feelings that bind and separate men and women. (Simon & Schuster)

Publisher's Price: $26.00
Discount **30%**
B&N Price $18.20

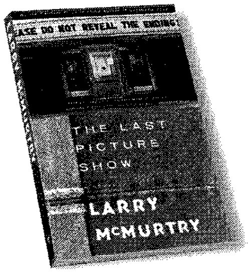


Also available:

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

A group of teens, beguiled by sex and baffled by love, stumble forward into adulthood. Set during the 1950s in a small town in North Central Texas called Thalia, *The Last Picture Show* introduced us to a cast of characters that have become a part of the American literary landscape. (Scribner Paperback Fiction)

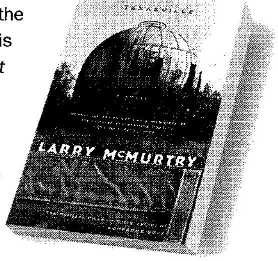
Pub. Price: $11.00
Discount **20%**
B&N Price $8.80



TEXASVILLE

During the oil bust of the 1980s, the residents of Thalia plan the town's centennial as the economy disintegrates around them. This arresting, tragi-comic sequel to *The Last Picture Show* finds Duane, a one-time millionaire, on the verge of bankruptcy and struggling through the stresses of middle-age. (Scribner Paperback Fiction)

Pub. Price: $13.00
Discount **20%**
B&N Price: $10.40



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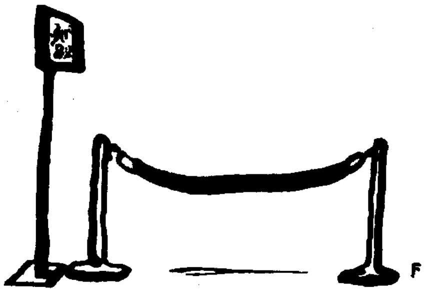


THE MOVIES

OPENING

Another Day in Paradise—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 22. (Angelika Film Center.)

The Children of Heaven—Majid Majidi's tale of two siblings in Tehran. In Farsi. Opening Jan. 22. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Gloria—A remake of John Cassavetes's 1980 film about the relationship between a hard-bitten woman and a young boy. With Sharon Stone and Jean-Luke Figueroa; directed by Sidney Lumet. Opening Jan. 22. (Criterion Center, Murray Hill Cinemas, and 64th and 2nd.)

My Name Is Joe—Ken Loach's story of romance and survival in late-nineties Glasgow. With Peter Mullan and Louise Goodall. Opening Jan. 22. (BAM Rose Cinemas and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Playing by Heart—Eleven Los Angelenos in different stages of love. Directed by Willard Carroll. Opening Jan. 22.

Six-String Samurai—A postapocalyptic thriller, directed by Lance Mungia, with Jeffrey Falcon. Opening Jan. 22. (Cinema Village.)

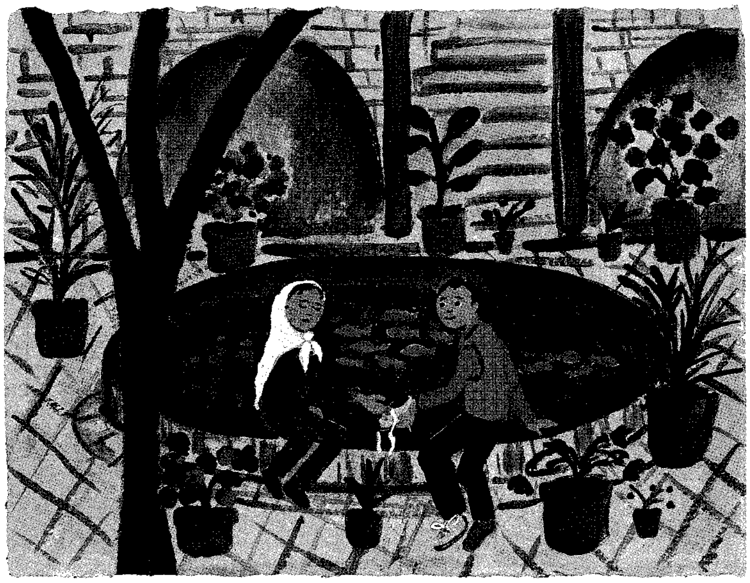
Still Crazy—A comedy about the twenty-year-reunion tour of an English rock group. With Stephen Rea; directed by Brian Gibson. Opening Jan. 22. (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

The Winners—Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Jan. 20.

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

Affliction—Nick Nolte, committing himself to a difficult part with a manly readiness that inspires affection, even awe, is Wade Whitehouse, a divorced policeman and hired hand floundering badly in a snowbound New Hampshire town. Both kindly and belligerent, Wade misses the meaning and rhythm of events, and reacts too much or too little, erupting in anger over what he should laugh off, ridiculing what he should take seriously. The movie is a kind of psychological thriller: Why is Wade so screwed up? (We find out.) Writer-director Paul Schrader flinches at nothing and takes us deep into the texture and causes of this man's failure; the movie, though relentless, is severely beautiful and finally exhilarating, like a sharp, cold wind taken in the face. With James Coburn as Wade's horrifying father, whose violent temper Wade has inherited; Willem Dafoe as his brother, who has sensibly (though rather contemptibly) withdrawn from the scene; Sissy Spacek as his girlfriend; and Mary Beth Hurt as his ex-wife. Schrader adapted Russell Banks's 1989 novel himself. Shot in rural Canada, near Montreal.—*David Denby* (1/11/99) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



Opening Jan. 22, Majid Majidi's "The Children of Heaven."

ELIZA GRAN

A Civil Action—Yet another movie about the redemption of a lawyer. Swathed in double-breasted Italian suits, Jan Schlichtmann (John Travolta), a flashy Boston ambulance chaser, gets caught up in a working-class town's battle with two large corporations that may have polluted its water and caused several deaths. Obsessed, Schlichtmann loses his professional judgment and sacrifices everything to the case. That the story is true (and based on an expertly written book by Jonathan Harr) doesn't make "A Civil Action" any more satisfying dramatically—there's a streak of obviousness in the moral melodrama that dampens one's interest. Robert Duvall gives a witty performance as a seemingly preoccupied and eccentric but actually devastatingly effective litigator; unfortunately, the big confrontation between Duvall and Travolta which the entire movie seems headed for never materializes. Written and directed by Steven Zaillian.—*D.D.* (1/11/99) (Cinema I, Guild, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Comfort of Strangers (1991)—Harold Pinter's screenplay, adapted from a novel by Ian McEwan, is a kinky contemporary variation on the sort of plot that made Victorian readers shiver—the story of innocents lured into the clutches of charming villains. The innocents here are an unmarried English couple (Natasha Richardson and Rupert Everett) vacationing in Venice; the evil seducers are a husband and wife (Christopher Walken and Helen Mirren) whose tastes run to voyeurism and sadomasochism; the dread lair in which the monsters toy with their prey is a huge, ornately furnished apartment with a spectacular view of the city. The director, Paul Schrader, dresses his characters in Armani and sets the camera in motion to swirl gracefully around them, picking up miragelike shimmers from the canals and beautiful but ominous architectural details; the languorous camera movements create an authentically gothic sense of catastrophe just around the corner.—*Terrence Rafferty* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Jan. 24.)

Dr. Akagi—In Japan, before the 1945 surrender, a provincial doctor races around town (literally—Dr. Akagi runs everywhere) in a non-stop campaign against a hepatitis epidemic. The seeming irrelevance of his quest is exactly the point: the movie suggests that in a time of extreme violence and disintegration, remaining devoted to one's calling is the only salvation. The veteran Japanese director Shohei Imamura works with great good humor and displays a surprising streak of erotic curiosity: as Dr. Akagi (Akira Emoto) gathers an irregular band of helpers—a prostitute, a morphine-addicted doctor, an escaped Dutch prisoner of war—the movie turns into a bedraggled celebration of sanity, sexuality, and true good-heartedness. In Japanese.—*D.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

The Faculty—When he gets into a rhythm, Robert Rodriguez is a real pulp artist; when he falls out of rhythm, he tends to overindulge in showy special effects and pointless, juvenile misogyny. Working in both modes here, he brings us the story of alien parasites that have invaded the bodies of the teachers at an Ohio high school, and the six kids (a grab bag of cheerleaders and misfits, led by Elijah Wood as a lonely nerd) who try to stop them. Rodriguez's zippy editing style makes the first half of this film both giddier and more dreadful than the usual teen slasher flick. But he gets distracted by all the twists and turns, and fails to go in for the kill. The screenplay is by Kevin Williamson, who also wrote "Scream."—*Sarah Kerr* (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, State, and Union Square.)

The General—John Boorman's deadpan-cool celebration of the Irish thief and populist hero Martin Cahill, who died in 1994. As embodied by the great Irish actor Brendan Gleeson, Cahill may be the least glamorous gangster in motion-picture history. Gleeson has a thick neck, a massive forehead and jowls, and a large doughy body. Moving along Dublin's streets with the hood of his jacket pulled over his head, he might be an animated potato sack, or perhaps some creature—a hedgehog or beaver—concentrating on the terrain. Cahill is in fact a criminal genius and a fantastically aggressive personality. He always defeats expectations (even in death), and so does the movie. With Jon Voight as the Dublin police inspector who lacks the sense of humor to understand what Cahill is up to. In black-and-white.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Hilary and Jackie—Anand Tucker's film takes us through the politely fraught story of the cellist Jacqueline du Pré and her sister Hilary. We see them first as young girls, and follow their rivalry; Hilary, the sensible flutist, is gradually outstripped by her more impassioned sister. The sense of period, of ungainly English pride, is funny and acute, but the movie mislays its sense of wit as the girls grow up. The nub of the tale, in which the now famous Jackie (Emily Watson) starts up a rural threesome with Hilary (Rachel Griffiths) and Hilary's husband Kiffer Finzi (David Morrissey), feels both overblown and oddly beside the point; it certainly means that Tucker takes his eye, or his ear, off the music. The whole picture, indeed, is more likely to gratify the emotionally prurient than to appease lovers of Beethoven and Elgar; that is certainly the effect of Watson's strains and strivings, and you feel grateful whenever Griffiths and Morrissey (both excellent) manage to calm her down. With Celia Imrie as the girls' tireless mother, and James Frain as Daniel Barenboim.—*Anthony Lane* (1/18/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

The Hi-Lo Country—A couple of best friends—Pete (Billy Crudup) and Big Boy (Woody Harrelson)—come back from the Second World War and try to raise cattle according to the old ways. Representing the new ways is Jim Ed (Sam Elliott), who owns pretty much everything in that corner of New Mexico. In short, this is an elegiac Western, which tends to be the only variety that you see nowadays. The director is Stephen Frears, who seems slightly overwhelmed by the wide-open spaces; he is happier with the tense turmoil of the drama indoors, as both Pete and Big Boy fall for the same married woman (Patricia Arquette). Everything tightens up nicely toward the end, as the rivalries bristle, and as Frears displays his usual talent for sweaty foreboding; whether his two stars have got the presence for this kind of intensity is another matter. Adapted from the Max Evans novel, the script is by Walon Green, who wrote "The Wild Bunch" for Sam Peckinpah; you can't help feeling that Peckinpah himself, especially in the relaxed mournfulness of his later style, would have been the man for this tale, too.—*A.L.* (1/18/99) (64th and 2nd.)

Hurlyburly—Hollywood lowlifes awash in cynicism, drugs, desperation, and peculiarly elaborate pedantry about minor verbal distinctions in the absence of genuine feeling about anything. What seemed shocking onstage fifteen years ago in David Rabe's play now seems rancid and rather meaningless, though it's still funny. The actors appear to revel in the vileness of the characters they are playing. Sean Penn is particularly good as the unloved scuzzbag, Eddie. With Chazz Palminteri as a psychopathic actor, Kevin Spacey doing his affectless thing, Robin Wright Penn, Meg Ryan, Anna Paquin, and Garry Shandling. Rabe adapted his own play. Directed by Anthony Drazan.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

Lee Marvin: A Personal Portrait by John Boorman (1998)—With a rugged torso, a shock of white hair, and a slablike face marked by a mashed nose and piercing eyes, Lee Marvin was a startling, wired big-screen presence. He tore through Boorman's "Point Blank" (1967) with a leopardlike gait that resembled a tuned-up version of John Wayne's. This first-person documentary is worth seeing just for the tingling moment in which Boorman shows Marvin striding down a corridor and says, "Walker, I named him." Boorman demonstrates how much he learned from his star and friend about making fierce and conflicted emotions palpable. He traces the roots of Marvin's often menacing dynamism to the scars he suffered as a marine on Saipan in the Second World War. Boorman is appealingly direct; he casually trashes the famous palimony suit brought against Marvin without stopping the film dead.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; Jan 23.)

Mighty Joe Young—The 1949 tearjerker has been updated for political correctness, and the result is quite affecting, in the Disney way. Charlize Theron plays the daughter of a murdered gorilla researcher. She's grown up alone in the African jungle and gets along famously with Joe, a gorilla who just happens to be three times the normal size. When an environmentalist (Bill Paxton) offers to save Joe from greedy poachers by moving him to California, she goes along for the ride. Some rather predictable chaos ensues, but the Disney engineers do a spectacular job of convincing us that Joe is a sentient creature capable of love and despair.—*S.K.* (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

Patch Adams—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Metro Cinema, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, Union Square, and Waverly.)

The Prince of Egypt—The story of Moses, in a big, blustery, chest-beating animated feature from DreamWorks. The idea is presumably to trump Disney at its own game; the method, more bizarrely, is to trump Cecil B. De Mille at *his* own game. The speaking cast is absurdly strong, led by Val Kilmer as Moses, and including Danny Glover, Ralph Fiennes, Jeff Goldblum, Sandra Bullock, Patrick Stewart, and Michelle Pfeiffer.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, State, and Union Square.)

Shakespeare in Love—A ripely emotional comedy-fantasia—concocted by director John Madden and screenwriters Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard—of how Shakespeare came to write "Romeo and Juliet." In 1593, young Will (Joseph Fiennes), a stud with liquid eyes and full lips, is just an unhappy and unproductive hack, jealous of the greater Christopher Marlowe (Rupert Everett). At first the movie comes at us too broadly, with many facetiously anachronistic jokes about the grubby professional routines of the theatre. But Will falls in love with the fictional heiress Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), and when these two poeticizing lovers climb into bed, and Shakespeare's quill begins to fly, the cleverness catches fire and "Shakespeare in Love" turns into an exciting literary-erotic entertainment.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Showplace.)

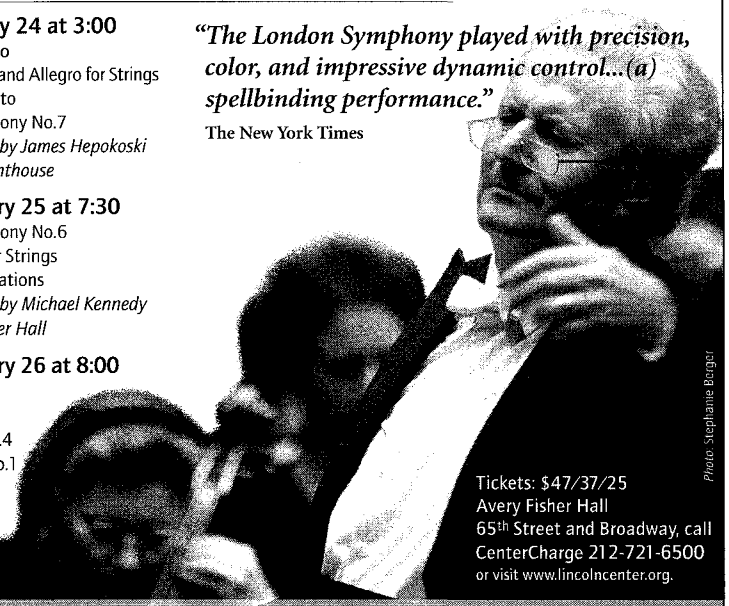
Stepmom—A wealthy lawyer (Ed Harris) leaves his wife (Susan Sarandon) for a young photographer (Julia Roberts). Needless to say, his kids (Jena Malone and Liam Aiken) don't like the idea: they resent the presence of the interloper, who spends the rest of the movie trying to win them over. Just to complicate the issue, the wife learns that she has terminal cancer. Sarandon and Harris do their best with director Chris Columbus's slow, nervous pace and with a script that is itself incurable. Poor Julia Roberts is forced to indicate her photographic prowess by announcing "It's a wrap" at regular intervals; it's that kind of movie.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Swindle—In Claude Chabrol's fiftieth film, a July-December pair of con artists crisscrossing provincial France in a motor home do very well for themselves with a simple but ingenious ploy: Betty (Isabelle Huppert) seduces middle-aged men at conventions and slips knockout drops into their nightcaps; while they're sleeping, she and Victor (Michel Serrault) fleece them of only part of their money, and she leaves them a sweet note and all their illusions. But then the partners stumble into a criminal enterprise way out of their league, putting their mettle—and their relationship—to the test. A droll, adroit take on the caper film. In French.—*Jeffrey Gustavson* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Thin Red Line—Terrence Malick's first film in twenty years is about a company of American troops at Guadalcanal. What happens, in essence, is that they come ashore and take an enemy-held hill; somehow, Malick, who was never a man to be hurried, spins this simple action out to nearly three hours. The cast includes Nick Nolte, Sean Penn, Elias Koteas, John Savage, Woody Harrelson, George Clooney, and John Travolta, with strong performances from younger actors like Ben Chaplin and Jim Caviezel, but they all drift in and out of the action, never staying long enough to hold center stage. Malick seems to like his characters lonely—they talk to themselves in voice-over but rarely connect with other men. The result is a ravishingly strange

Sir Colin Davis & the London Symphony Orchestra

The Glory of Britain: Sir Edward Elgar



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The New York Times

Sunday, January 24 at 3:00
Steven Isserlis, cello
Elgar: Introduction and Allegro for Strings
Elgar: Cello Concerto
Beethoven: Symphony No.7
Pre-concert lecture by James Hepokoski at 2:00, Kaplan Penthouse

Monday, January 25 at 7:30
Beethoven: Symphony No.6
Elgar: Serenade for Strings
Elgar: Enigma Variations
Pre-concert lecture by Michael Kennedy at 6:30, Avery Fisher Hall

Tuesday, January 26 at 8:00
Emanuel Ax, piano
Beethoven:
Piano Concerto No.4
Elgar: Symphony No.1
Pre-concert lecture at 7:00, Kaplan Penthouse

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mess: part bloody action movie, part pantheistic trip.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

The Winners—From Holland, an extraordinarily poignant where-are-they-now documentary about four past winners of a prestigious international musical competition who went on to good but not first-rate careers. One Russian pianist fell afoul of Soviet authorities; another Russian, a violinist, played so close to perfection that it shattered his fragile nerves. The message of the film is that genius alone is not enough—often it's the near-geniuses, those able to function in the world, who are most successful. A little luck helps, too. Directed by Paul Cohen; written by Cohen and David van Tijn. In English, French, Russian, and Flemish.—*S.K.* (Film Forum; starting Jan. 20.)

You've Got Mail—A regrouping of the team that brought you "Sleepless in Seattle"—director Nora Ephron and leading players Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Once again, the story hinges on a couple who know each other for real only in the final minute—in this case, Joe Fox, who owns a chain of large bookstores, and Kathleen Kelly, who runs one small bookstore and finds herself put out of business. They meet and dislike each other without realizing that they've been waging a little light flirtation, under appropriate pseudonyms, via E-mail. The movie is sweetly undemanding, as you might expect, but the romantic suspense is zilch, and, compared with Ernst Lubitsch's "The Shop Around the Corner," on which Ephron based her script, everything feels spineless and slack.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

AMERICAN HISTORY X: Village East Cinemas. . . . **AT FIRST SIGHT:** Chelsea West, Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **A BUG'S LIFE:** Chelsea West, Lincoln Square, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **THE CELEBRATION:** 62nd & Broadway and The Screening Room. . . . **CELEBRITY** (reviewed in our issue of 11/23/98): Village East Cinemas. . . . **CENTRAL STATION** (11/30/98): BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema. . . . **DANCING AT LUGHNASA:** 59th Street East Cinema, Waverly, and Union Square. . . . **DOWN IN THE DELTA:** BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea West, Criterion Center, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **ELIZABETH** (11/16/98): Art Greenwich Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Regency. . . . **ENEMY OF THE STATE:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Sutton, and Union Square. . . . **GODS AND MONSTERS** (11/9/98): Quad Cinema. . . . **HAPPINESS** (10/19/98): Gotham Cinema and Village East Cinemas. . . . **HOME FRIES:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **IN DREAMS:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, State, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL** (11/16/98): Angelika Film Center and Paris. . . . **LITTLE VOICE:** Beekman and Union Square. . . . **LIVING OUT LOUD** (11/30/98): Eastside Playhouse. . . . **MARY JANE'S NOT A VIRGIN ANYMORE:** Cinema Village. . . . **PLEASANTVILLE:** Eastside Playhouse. . . . **PSYCHO:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **RUSH HOUR:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **SAVING PRIVATE RYAN** (8/3/98): Union Square. . . . **A SIMPLE PLAN:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **STAR TREK: INSURRECTION:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **STEAM: THE TURKISH BATH:** Quad Cinema. . . . **THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **VARSITY BLUES:** East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **VIRUS:** Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Cinemas. . . . **WAKING NED DEVINE:** Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Union Square.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**THEATRE 2:** "Mississippi Mermaid" (1969, François Truffaut; in French). . . . **THEATRE 3:** "Touch of Evil" (1958, Orson Welles).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Films from Brazil; all in Portuguese, with English subtitles. Jan. 21 at 2:30: "Matraga" (1966, Roberto Santos). . . . Jan. 21 at 6: "Macunaima" (1969, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade). . . . Jan. 22 at 2:30: "Black God, White Devil" (1964, Glauber Rocha). . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 6: Short films by Pelle Lowe, Phil Weisman, Lewis Klahr, and Jem Cohen. . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 2:30 and Jan. 22 at 3: "What Farocki Taught" (1998, Jill Godmilow) and "Standing on the Edge Watching" (1996, C. Melinda Levin). . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8:30: "The Lady Vanishes" (1938, Alfred Hitchcock). . . . ¶ A program of films directed by Robert Bresson; in French, with English subtitles. Jan. 22 and Jan. 25 at 6: "Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne" (1945). . . Jan. 22 at 8: "Mouchette" (1967). . . . Jan. 23 at 2:30 and Jan. 26 at 6: "Affaires Publiques" (1934) and "The Way of Bresson" (1983). . . . Jan. 23 at 6 and Jan. 25 at 2:30: "Les Anges du Péché" (1943). . . . Jan. 24 at 6 and Jan. 26 at 2:30: "Diary of a Country Priest" (1951). . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 5: "Lee Marvin: A Personal Portrait by John Boorman" (†) and "Hell in the Pacific" (1968, John Boorman). . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 5: "Akira Kurosawa's Dreams" (1990, Kurosawa; in Japanese).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Jan 27: The Eighth Annual New York Jewish Film Festival.

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by Paul Schrader. Jan. 23 at 2: "Cat People" (1982). . . . Jan. 23 at 4:30: "Light Sleeper" (1992). . . . Jan. 24 at 2: "Patty Hearst" (1988). . . . Jan. 24 at 4:30: "The Comfort of Strangers" (†).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Jan. 26 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Ma Vie en Rose" (1997, Alain Berliner; in French).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Jan. 24 at 7, the feature will be "Some Like It Hot" (1959, Billy Wilder), with Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis, and Marilyn Monroe.

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—Through Jan. 28: A program of films that opened in 1998 that you might have missed, including "Your Friends & Neighbors" (Neil LaBute) and "Velvet Goldmine" (Todd Haynes).

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3587)—A program of French films, 1958-98; in French, with English subtitles. Jan. 20 at 6: "Savage Nights" (1993, Cyril Collard). . . . Jan. 22-23 at 2:30: "Reprise" (1996, Hervé Le Roux). . . . Jan. 22-23 at 7:30: "Hexagone" (1994, Malik Chibane) and "Tea in the Harem" (1985, Mehdi Charef).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Jan. 20 at 6:30 and 8:30, Jan. 21-22 at 6:30, Jan. 23 at 4 and Jan. 24 at 6: "The Milky Way" (1996, Ali Nassar). . . . ¶ Jan. 20 at 8: "Criminal" (1994, David Jacobson and Wolfgang Held). . . . ¶ A program of films directed by Sergei Paradjanov. Jan. 21 at 7, Jan. 22 at 9, and Jan. 23 at 5: "Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors" (1965). . . . Jan. 21 and Jan. 23 at 9 and Jan. 24 at 5: "The Color of Red Pomegranates" (1969). . . . Jan. 22 and Jan. 24 at 7: "The Legend of Suram Fortress" (1985). . . . Jan. 23 at 7 and Jan. 24 at 9: "Ashik Kerib" (1988). . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8:30: "The Fundamental Gilbert and George" (1997, Gerald Fox). . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 8:30: "The War Symphonies: Shostakovich Against Stalin" (1997, Larry Weinstein).

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-623-2770.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema I and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton I and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly I and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

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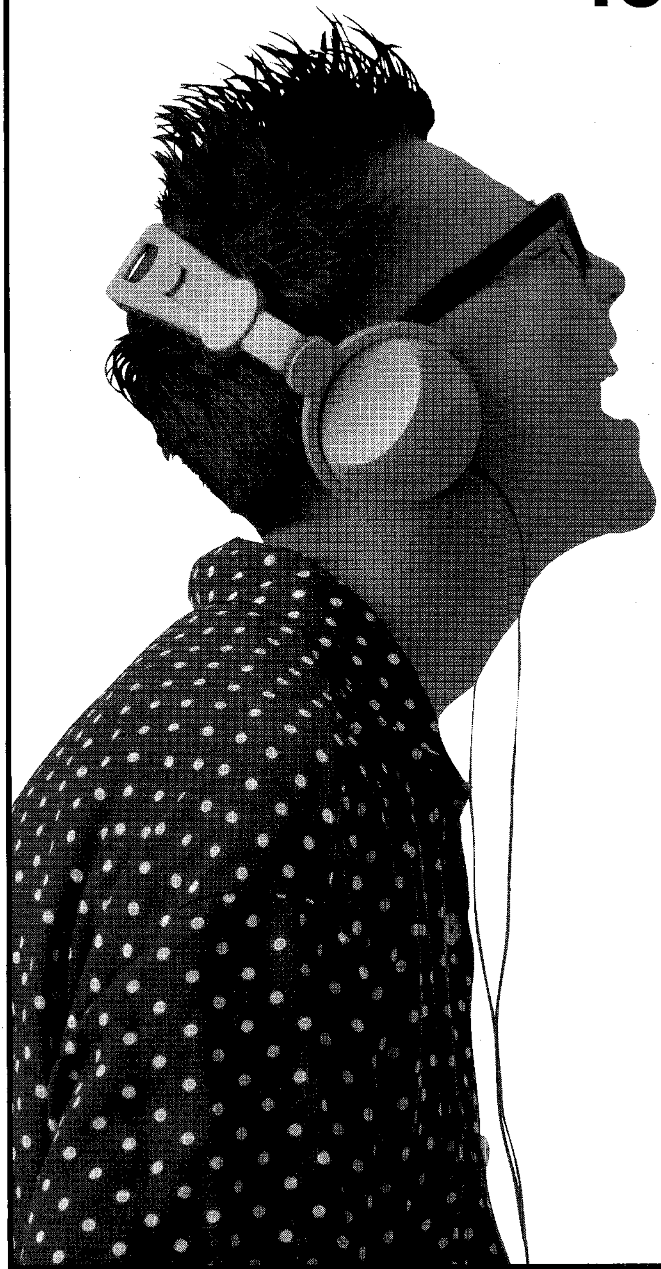

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THE NEW YORKER

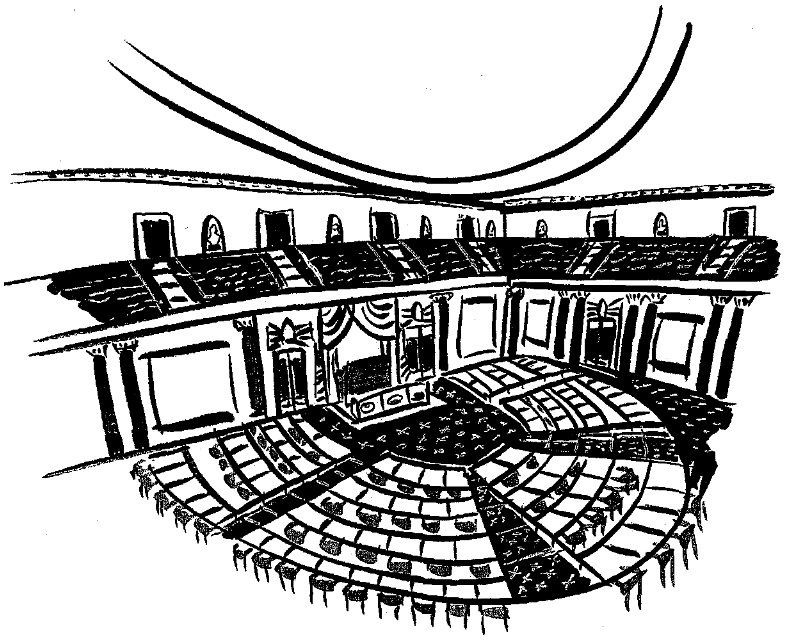
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

Those poll-defying Republicans.

Before Monica Lewinsky arrived on the scene, the trend in American public life was clear. More and more, Washington was a place controlled by market research, to the point where our elected officials seemed to be turning into mere public-relations mannequins, like those live astronauts NASA insists on launching into space.

Consider the Clintons. They didn't just conduct polls on major public-policy issues; they were even counselled on vacation spots. In the summer of 1995, we have since been told, all the President really wanted to do was play golf on Martha's Vineyard, but Dick Morris sent him hiking in the Rockies instead. Golf, Morris advised the President, was a Republican sport. The voters he needed to win over were the kind of people who went camping, so the Chief Executive would have to sleep in a tent. As for the Republicans, we now know that the bold rhetoric of their "revolution" was crafted in focus groups. Before Newt Gingrich announced, for instance, how he was going to "preserve, protect and strengthen" Medicare, his pollster had tried out "restructure" and "modernize" (too "techie," voters said) and "reform" (too frightening).



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Now, though, the trial of the President is upon us, and it is challenging this basic pattern in American politics. From the very beginning of the Lewinsky scandal, the polls have been consistent. By a margin that has never strayed far from two to one, Americans have been against, in chronological order, a protracted investigation by Kenneth Starr of who fondled what and how vigorously; a protracted investigation by the House Judiciary Committee Republicans of the same fondlings; and the President's impeachment by the full House. Now the public is just as emphatically against a full-scale trial in the Senate: sixty per cent of those surveyed in the latest CBS News poll said they believed that such a trial was unnecessary.

Yet, at every step of the impeachment process, Republicans in Congress have thumbed their noses at the polls and forged ahead. To defend this flouting of the public will, Party leaders have reached for some pretty lofty justifications. "Look, if Jesus Christ had taken a poll, he would never have preached the Gospel," the House Judiciary Committee chairman, Henry Hyde, declared last month on ABC.

The whole Lewinsky mess is the culmination (or so it must be fervently hoped) of an unprecedentedly trashy era in American public life. Still, in an odd sort of way, perhaps we ought to be grateful. It is awfully tough to argue that the Republicans—who, so far, are two Speakers and five House seats in the hole—are behaving the way they are as the result of cool partisan calculations, based on a careful analysis of the latest data. Let's imagine the worst: that Henry Hyde, for all his talk of martyrology, is really motivated by an acrid mix of sanctimony and personal pique; that Tom DeLay, the House Whip, for all his invocations of the sanctity of the Constitution, is simply consumed by blind hatred; that behind the Republican campaign is a lust for revenge that dates all the way back to Watergate. Whatever you may think of these emotions, they are, at least, genuine passions, as opposed to manufactured ones.

In the early days of the scandal, Republican leaders may have assumed that the President's shame would be their gain. But that point is long past, and by now the play—or is it the joke?—of the dialectic must be clear to them: the destruction of the President is also the destruction of his destroyers. The political carnage is pointless, and the spectacle of smut transfigured into history is depressing, but the current episode does show that the system has not yet been fully automated. Our elected representatives have still got their hands on the controls, and every now and then, wisely or unwisely, they insist on steering all by themselves.

—Elizabeth Kolbert

FULLER EXPLANATION DEPT.

Tom Wolfe decodes the naughty riddle that has his readers stumped.

TOM WOLFE'S new blockbuster, "A Man in Full," has left readers marvelling at the degree of detail—that scene with the mare!—with which the author has drawn the world of the Atlanta real-estate mogul Charlie Croker. But there is at least one detail that is left unexplained: what, exactly, is "that thing with the cup" that is alluded to on page 228?

In the passage in question, the sixty-year-old Croker is remembering a visit he'd made a few years earlier to a seedy motel called the Swallows, with Serena, the much younger, milkily gorgeous woman who becomes his second wife. "Once they got in the room, she produced that little cup from her handbag, and they did that thing with the cup, something he had never heard of in all his life," Wolfe writes. "He had lost his mind to her demented form of lust. Danger! Imminent exposure! That thing with the cup!"

All this has left readers who had hitherto considered themselves fairly sophisticated people saying, Huh?

Byron Dobell, who edited Tom Wolfe's breakthrough magazine story, "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," for *Esquire,* was perplexed. "My first thought was that it was something very literal, like a pessary, a primitive contraceptive," Dobell said. "But that wouldn't be very exciting. I conjured up a variety of possibilities of what you could do with a little cup, which I pictured as a certain kind of demitasse. But then my mind came to a halt, because it didn't seem very interesting."

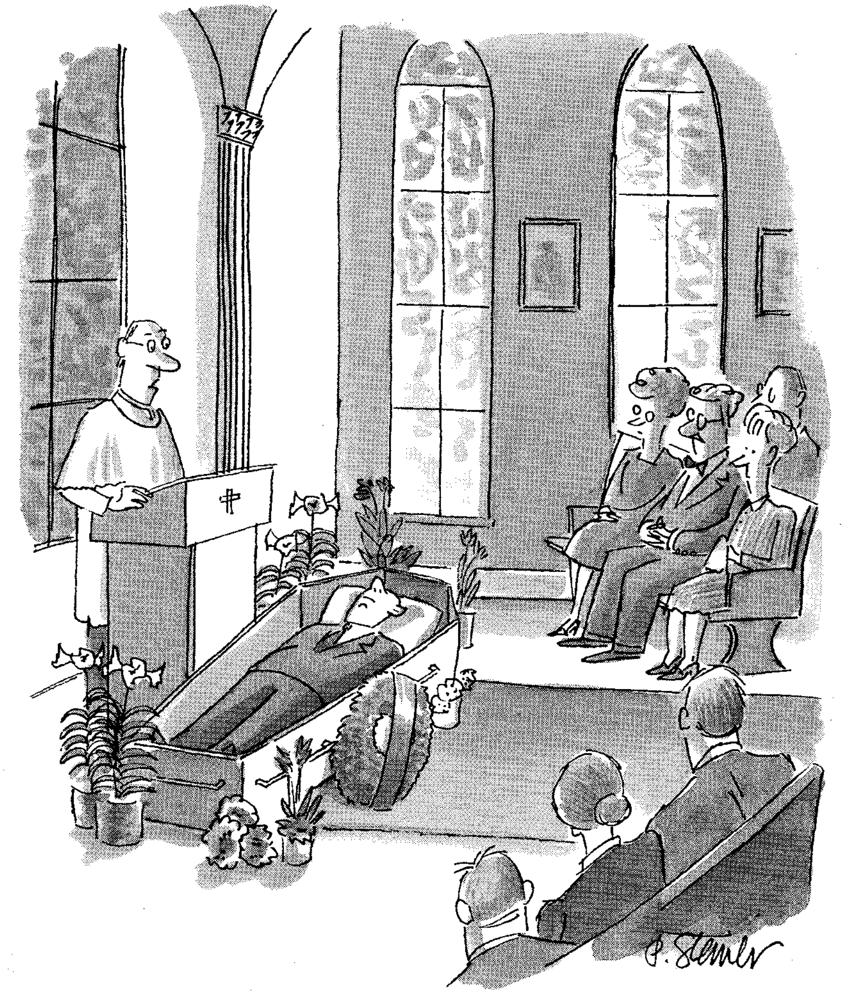
"I stopped dead when I got to it and thought to myself, How did I miss *that*?" Dominique Browning, the editor of *House & Garden*, said last week. "I could not even begin to imagine what it was. A Dixie Cup? And where would you put it? I don't know which is worse—to admit that you don't know what it is or to actually find out."

Other dinner-party speculations have been just as imaginative, though no more comfortable: The unconventional employment of an athletic supporter? A particularly attenuated form of the activity Bill Clinton believes isn't sex at all? ("Ugh—it's totally not *that*," said Jeff Seroy, the exceedingly worldly director of publicity at Wolfe's publisher, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, on being quizzed about the reference.)

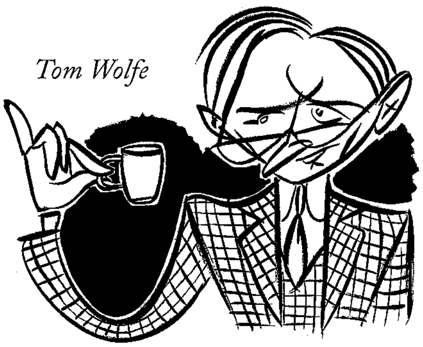
When Tom Wolfe was told last week that no one has the faintest idea what that thing with the cup is, he said, "As a matter of fact, neither do I. I concocted the phrase to somehow give you a vision of some unmentionable perversion. It sounded so simple, yet so dreadfully titillating, but I never even had a glimmer of a notion of what it might be. I think it is a pretty good metaphor for ultimate depravity."

Wolfe also admitted that this was not the first time he had used the phrase; it also crops up on page 167 of "The Bonfire of the Vanities," in a reference to a series of articles that Peter Fallow, the sodden British-journalist character, has written about the English upper classes. The articles, Wolfe writes, "had been full of names and titles and helicopters and perplexing perversions ('that thing with the cup') and costly diseases." Elsewhere in the novel there is another beguiling cup reference, Wolfe said: "Fallow wakes up terribly hung over, and the night before flashes by him, and all he remembers is that he was with a bunch of people and they are driving around looking for some after-hours joint called the Cup. It is mercifully devoid of meaning."

The "Bonfire" thing-with-the-cup reference prompted very few inquiries, Wolfe said, perhaps because it came in relation to a minor character. (Or perhaps because it surprises no one to hear that the English upper classes engage in peculiar sexual practices that the rest of us have never heard of.) But Wolfe said that since the publication of "A Man in Full" he has received five or six letters from readers concerning the obscure activity in question, "with the most appalling analyses of what it is."



"I think Republicans and Democrats alike can agree that Frank Shustermann is dead."



Tom Wolfe

These analyses he declined to reveal. "It's too disgusting," he said.

When asked whether he was pleased by the notion that couples all over America might, on a Saturday night, be attempting by trial and error to hit upon "that thing with the cup" in the privacy of their own bedrooms, Wolfe seemed to flinch at the other end of the telephone. "I hope the opposite will occur," he said. "I hope that they will replace the actual thing with just thinking about it." —REBECCA MEAD

THE BOARDS

A Broadway legend offers tips on time management.

UTA HAGEN, whom the *Times'* Vincent Canby recently dubbed the No. 1 actress on or off Broadway this season, was at home in Washington Square the other afternoon preparing for her hundred-and-seventy-second performance in "Collected Stories," the two-character play by Donald Margulies. She goes onstage five nights and three afternoons a week. She'll be eighty in June. She had breast cancer in 1976 and is now fine. Until a couple of years ago, she smoked three packs of Gitanes a day; these days she sticks to two packs of low-nicotine, low-tar cigarettes called Now. "I tried several times to quit, but no go. Anyway, I'm so old, who cares?" she said, and gave an impressively long, bubbling laugh. "Besides, I've got so many disciplines I don't need another one. I've just finished recovering from four weeks with a torn ligament in my leg, which I got by walking wrong off the last step from my dressing room. Six weeks before that, I had laryngitis and a yeast infection on my vocal cords. But I didn't miss a single performance. The theatre is four and a half blocks away, and I like to walk to it. I'm not one of these young kids who have absolutely no discipline. I've been acting for sixty-two years. I'm used to playing a role for at least a year. It's thrilling, because so many in our audience for this play are young—not your usual crowd."

Miss Hagen lives in a five-room, three-fireplace, rent-controlled apartment that she got fifty years ago with her late husband, Herbert Berghof, the founder of the HB Studio. (An acting class still costs seven dollars there, with half going to the teacher. "Herbert was a dyed-in-the-wool socialist," Miss Hagen said. "He believed fervently that people should not get rich on the backs of artists.") Miss Hagen has a fifty-eight-year-old daugher, Leticia, who is an actress, and a twenty-eight-year-old granddaughter, Teresa, who is a painter ("Not nonobjective but not really realistic, thank God," Miss Hagen said), but her only live-in intimate is an eleven-year-old, seven-pound, apricot-colored toy poodle named G.B. (after Shaw).

Promptly at 5:45 P.M., in a tiny, narrow bathroom, Miss Hagen started her regular routine of putting on makeup. G.B. positioned himself knowledgeably between the tub and his mistress and watched, mesmerized, as she studied herself in the mirror: very short, curly, reddish-blond hair, barely a wrinkle in her face. She wore a loose cardigan and a long black silk skirt, and she had two heavy wedding rings on her left hand. "Herbert and I did it twice," she said.

She cleaned her face with cold cream. "When I played Nina in 'The Seagull' on Broadway, with Lynn Fontanne and her husband, Alfred Lunt, Miss Fontanne told me, 'You don't make up for the balcony. You make up for the front row with opera glasses.' Miss Fontanne was my mentor," she said. "You can't go onstage without makeup. If you try it with your own skin, the lights eat it up." Without missing a beat, she asked, "You all right, G.B.?"

The dog looked at her adoringly.

"I have two big scenes in the play in which I cry, and G.B. waits in my dressing room and can hear me, and he cries along with me, every time," Miss Hagen said, smoothing foundation on her face with the quick strokes of a pro. "Now—" She picked up some false eyelashes. "Putting these on is quite a neat trick, and I can't wear my eyeglasses to do this." Two minutes later, the mission was accomplished. Miss Hagen gave a hoarse laugh that was still long and still cheerful.

Then she got dressed to go to the theatre—black pants, a loose shirtwaist, and a chiffon scarf to keep the makeup off the clothes. She lit a cigarette and drew deeply on it. "This is my time to clear my mind of everything and just be quiet," she said. "I had my lunch at three-thirty—filet of sole, asparagus, and baked potato. I usually shop at the Jefferson Market and cook myself. I took a short nap—dozed only, no deep sleep, so as not to get too logy. Then the makeup and quiet. I've got so many disciplines—when I rise, when I do my work, all of it. The young stars are always saying how exhausted they are." That hoarse, cheerful laugh again. "Of course they're exhausted. They fool around. They have no disciplines." —LILLIAN ROSS

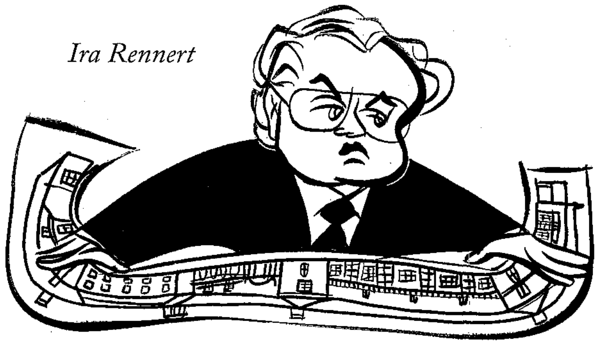
GOOD NEIGHBORS DEPT.

How the rich protect themselves from each other.

NOW that the strange case of the Sagaponack Homeowners Association vs. Ira Rennert appears to be concluded, it may be time to reflect on what has—and has not—been learned from this, the season's most engrossing episode of rich-on-rich violence. Rennert, as is now widely known, is the multimillionaire industrialist who is building a forty-two-thousand-square-foot single-family home, reported to cost a hundred million dollars, on a sixty-three-acre Hamptons potato field. The Sagaponack Homeowners Association is the opposing group of angry neighbors whose petition to withdraw Rennert's building permits was voted down earlier this month by the Town of Southampton's Zoning Appeals Board. The battle has been a long and heated one, about zoning laws and ocean views, and it has left those of us without homes in the Hamptons more than a little confused. Herewith, then, a brief guide for the uninitiated.

Let's start with the least technical, but perhaps the philosophically thorniest, question raised by the case. Why, in an area full of very big houses, is the prospect of a very, very big house so controversial? The answer is that “big” is a relative term. A standard new monster home in the Hamptons, for example, now runs between ten thousand and fourteen thousand square feet, which is to say that it probably has six or seven large bedrooms (each with its own bathroom), a great hall, a formal living room, an informal living room, a dining room, a media room, a library, a five-to-six-hundred-square-foot kitchen, maids' quarters, a pantry, and, say, a three- or four-car garage. “Some houses have a squash court, and I've built a few with bowling alleys,” Kurt Andreassen, a local contractor, said.

When Southampton decided, this fall, to place a limit on the size of all new houses, it settled on twenty thousand square feet, on the ground that that figure represents a reasonable limit, given the big-house norms of the area. At twenty thousand square feet, a house has perhaps ten or eleven bedrooms, a dozen bathrooms, a six-car garage, and maybe, oh, a mini-trading floor for the kids. By comparison, Rennert's house, at forty-two thousand square feet, has twenty-nine bedrooms, thirty-three bathrooms, and two bowling alleys. What the Town of Southampton was saying, in other words, is that twelve bedrooms and one bowling alley is fine, but twenty-nine bedrooms and two bowling alleys is not. Think of the twenty-thousand figure as the community standard—a social consensus—for the maximum size a Hamptons monster home *ought* to be. With that extra bowling alley and those seventeen additional bedrooms, Rennert just went too far.



Ira Rennert

Which brings us to question two: If twenty thousand square feet represents the Hamptons monster-home limit, then why didn't the Town of Southampton pass this zoning restriction long ago, before Rennert started building his dream house? You might think that it was because the town had been lax about zoning. But that is not the case. For example, the Sagaponack potato field where Rennert is building his house is zoned R-120, which means that the minimum lot size in the area for anyone looking to build a new house is three acres. There is also on eastern Long Island virtually no land zoned specifically for multifamily rental apartments. If you wanted to build an apartment house in the town of Southampton for people who are not millionaires, you would have to go before the town board and ask for a special variance. In Sagaponack, according to Paul Houlihan, Southampton's chief building inspector, such a variance would be impossible to get.

Suppose, then, that Rennert was not a multimillionaire but only a millionaire and couldn't afford the standard Sagaponack three-acre plot—which runs somewhere between seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars and a million dollars. He wants one acre. And suppose that, to make things more affordable, he wants to put up a small town house with a couple of apartments that he could rent out. Under Southampton zoning rules, his application would be denied outright, even though that little town house wouldn't block anyone's view of the beach. But a forty-two-thousand-square-foot house on sixty-three acres? According to the original zoning laws of the town, perfectly legal. In other words, the citizens of Southampton have lots of rules in place to protect their community from people who have less money than they do. It just never occurred to them, until Rennert came their way, that they also need to protect their community from people who have more money than they do. —MALCOLM GLADWELL

THE PICTURES

A first-time director breaks the youth barrier at Sundance.

“YOU don't always choose what you do. Sometimes what you do chooses you,” says Vann Siegert, the protagonist of “The Minus Man,” a movie that has its première this week at the Sundance Film Festival. The words might easily have been spoken by the movie's writer and director, Hampton Fancher. Sundance is usually associated with youth, but Fancher, who wrote the screenplay for the cult classic “Blade Runner,” is making his directorial début at the age of sixty. “I don't think time has any meaning to Hampton,” Ridley Scott, the director of “Blade Runner,” says of his friend. “Therefore he arrived at directing when he was ready.”

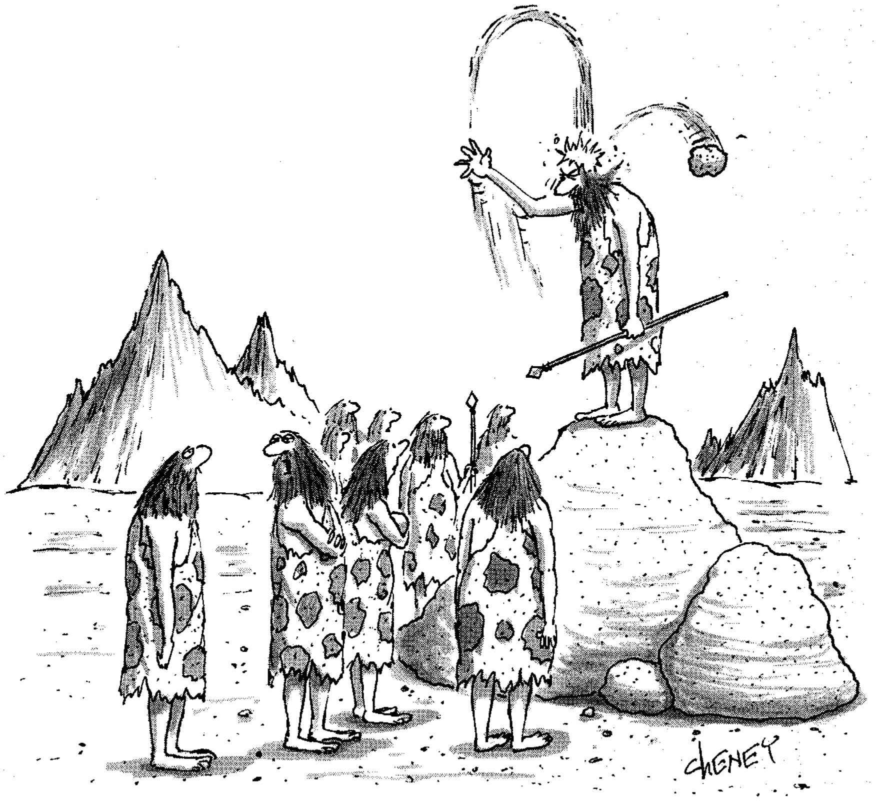
“The Minus Man,” which stars Owen Wilson, Janeane Garofalo, and Mercedes Ruehl, is a psychological thriller about a likable drifter who rolls into a small town and begins to befriend its lonely inhabitants, until his dark past catches up with him. The director describes Vann as a Western antihero, “displaced, solitary, arriving out of nowhere and departing to nowhere.” Fancher, who has led the life of an American picaro, could almost be talking about himself: he is a tall man with a lithe physique, a wide, furrowed, handsome face, and an abundance of hair on his head and bursting from an unbuttoned, frayed shirt. (Ridley Scott describes Fancher as a cross between Warren Beatty and Alfred E. Neuman; David Kanter, Fancher's agent, thinks the mix is more Mick Jagger and Isadora Duncan.)

Fancher grew up in Los Angeles and spent most of his school days in movie houses. In his teens, he dropped out of school, travelled to Spain, and, taking the name Mario Montejo, soon became a widely acclaimed flamenco dancer. At eighteen, Fancher moved back to the States and turned his attention to the movies. Long periods of destitution followed. He worked as an ice-cream vender, a room-service waiter, a caddie, and a ditchdigger—all the while acting in television shows like “Father Knows Best” and “Bonanza,” and in low-budget European movies. In 1964, when he was twenty-five, he married Sue Lyon, the seventeen-year-old star of “Lolita,” and the tabloids vilified him as a Svengali. The marriage broke up after eight months, and Fancher started to concentrate on writing.

“It has been suggested that I postponed my ambition to be a director, but it wasn't like that. I always thought I was on the verge of making a movie,” Fancher said. The studios paid him well for his scripts but rarely produced them. “People aren't interested in the things that interest me," he said, "like flat, affectless stories, antiheroes, good people who do terrible things that they can't share with anyone because they're trapped in solitude."

Now Fancher is taking some satisfaction in the notion that his work may at last be understood. Geoffrey Gilmore, the director of Sundance, believes that what sets Fancher's film apart is its ability to reflect upon questions more often left to literature: "He's interested in ontology, being, and consciousness. How things happen, the randomness of existence, and how choices are made."

But if Gilmore makes Fancher sound like an academic, others speak of him as a man whose wisdom and deep humanity make him an intuitive director. "Hampton's great talent is for living," his friend Barbara Hershey says. "I often think of the story of Don Quixote and the barmaid: she becomes a great lady because he sees her that way. Hampton gets all kinds of people to believe in themselves and to dream out loud." —ELIZABETH RUBIN



"Yet another apology."

• •

POSTSCRIPT

An author who belonged to everyone and no one.

A FEW years ago, I took part in an evening of tribute to Brian Moore, in Toronto, one of the novelist's many staging posts in a peripatetic life that began in Belfast in 1921 and ended last week in Malibu. It was, as these events often are, both generous and subliminally competitive: those who came wanted to praise best, and claim most. This was a feature of response to Moore and his work: everyone wanted to own him. He was an Irish writer, a British writer, a Canadian writer, an American writer. Graham Greene—to the useful joy of publishers—once called him his "favorite living novelist"; but even this came to have a faintly possessive edge to it, as if Greene were claiming discipleship or dependency.

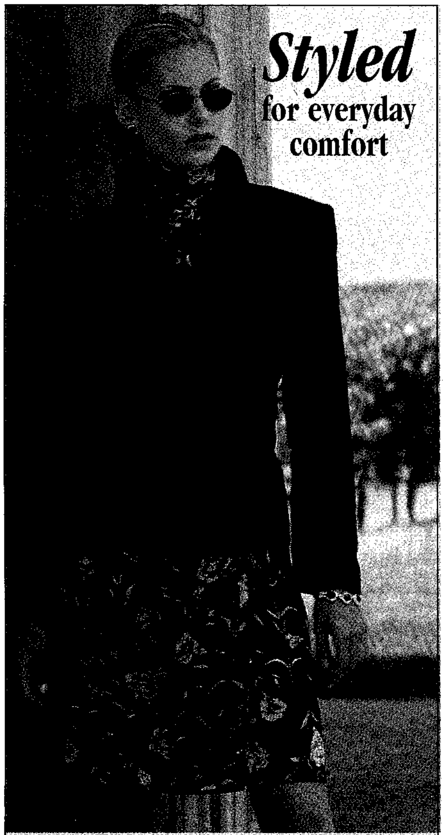
Yet Brian managed to evade all claim. I thought of him as someone who—despite a love of pleasure and social noise—was frequently, perhaps centrally, elusive: personally, nationally, textually. "I am an exile from everywhere," he once said. His novels betray little authorial presence; though he pillaged his own life in places, no doorbells go off on the page, admitting the reader into the private back room. His sympathies are universal yet particular: what Flaubert (in one of whose more obscure letters Moore found the germ of his last novel, "The Magician's Wife") called being "brother in God to everything that lives, from the giraffe and the crocodile to man."

In his fiction he was constantly relocating, rarely going close to repetition. The critic Christopher Ricks, reviewing "Black Robe," wrote that "the only wise prediction to make about a new Brian Moore is that it will be unpredictable and wise." He was a novelist who savored moral complexity, who understood about facing both ways at the same time. He even took this talent to an extreme geographical degree: his last years were divided between a house facing the Pacific, in Malibu, and a house facing the North Atlantic, on the shores of Nova Scotia.

It's easy to make a writer's life, especially at the moment of death, sound inexorable: twenty novels, five films made from them, assorted prizes, work with Hitchcock, two beautiful houses, a long and happy second marriage ("For Jean, *comme d'habitude*" was his final dedication). Like all writers, Brian had his doubts and his paranoias. Since he lived far from the centers of literary production, his glooms tended to be exaggerated by distance. "I always felt," he said, accounting for his disenchantment with one London publisher, "that I was the wife, and Philip Roth was the mistress." (No doubt Philip Roth considered yet another writer to be the mistress.)

But Brian's gloom was puckish and self-mocking, and balanced by a proper pride. "I think I'm very good," he once said. "I haven't disimproved." Born the year before "Ulysses" was published, Moore was an artist whose prose took a long and varied journey from Joycean display to a controlled sparseness. He was a literary novelist who did his work in silence, let his novels do the talking, and never put his life on show. That he wasn't more famous should come as no surprise, given the century. He honored his profession, and also knew its ironic dangers. He had, he confessed, "a terror of dying while I'm working on something. I think some other bastard will put an end to it, the way they do!"

—JULIAN BARNES



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LETTER FROM LOS ANGELES

LIFE OF THE PARTY

Gail Zappa began writing checks to the Democrats because Bill Clinton reminded her of her husband.

BY CONNIE BRUCK

EARLIER this month, one of the Democratic Party's most generous contributors had dinner with an old friend, Larry Flynt, at Chasen's, in Beverly Hills. The much publicized million-dollar bounty offered by Flynt for proof of sexual indiscretions by sanctimonious politicians has, of course, sealed his status as a social pariah; even Democrats condemn his efforts publicly and disavow any connection with him. But not this Democrat—Gail Zappa. She consistently goes out of her way to underscore that she is not only a friend but also a great admirer of Flynt's, and nothing seems to rile her more than what she views as the squeamishness of some Democratic politicians and their aides. "Why do they have to revile Larry?" she demanded. "Why can't they say, which is the truth, 'We really enjoy what Larry's doing, but we can't become involved in it'? " Gail, who is the widow of Frank Zappa, the composer and musician, has given more than half a million dollars to the Democratic Party and its candidates over the past three years, and she ranks among the Party's top individual donors. She is so solidly in the Democratic fold that she dines often at the White House and has become a regular at the fund-raising events that President Clinton and Vice-President Gore routinely attend when they are in Los Angeles.

At the dinner, the two old friends were a distinct contrast. Zappa, a warm, irrepressible woman with a vivid presence, is careless of externals—she was studiously unadorned, as always, wearing just a big dark sweater and a long skirt, and abjuring makeup and what she still calls a "hairdo." Flynt, although taciturn and remote at times, was visually flamboyant, with plenty of shine, from his signature ornate diamond jewelry to his gold-plated wheelchair. Raising their glasses, Zappa and Flynt drank toasts to President Clinton, to the Democrats, and, as Flynt declared finally, with a wicked grin, "To Monday!" Zappa flashed him an exuberant thumbs-up and a big smile. On that day, Flynt explained to me, he would release the name of a second Republican congressman (following Speaker-Elect Robert L. Livingston) whom his investigation had turned up. And Flynt mentioned, as he had before, audiotapes of phone sex which he says are among his collected evidence, and chortled at their contents: words that could not have better suited his purpose, to show up what he sees as the Republicans' essential hypocrisy.

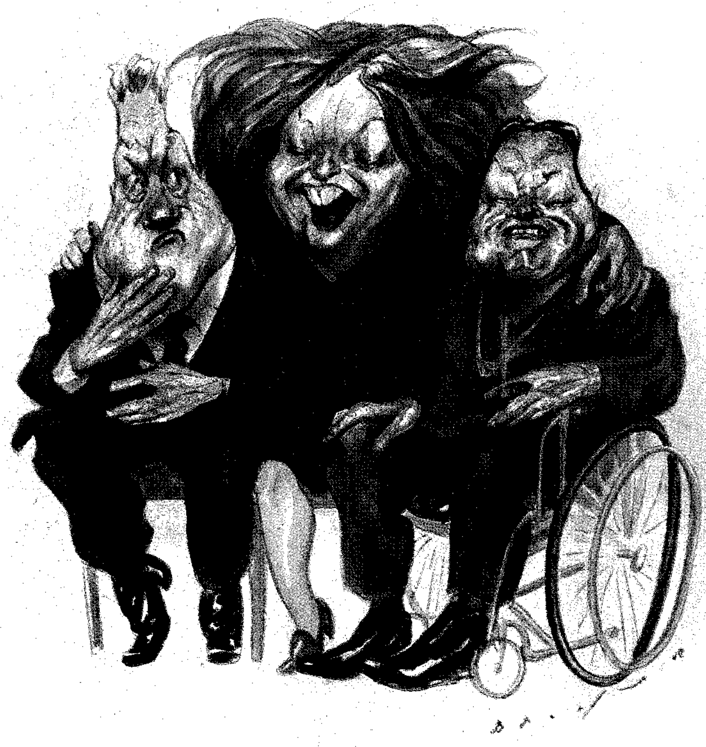
Flynt met the Zappas in 1984, when he asked Frank to create a photo spread of one of his fantasies for *Hustler*, Flynt's smutty sex magazine. The two became fast friends, and remained so until Zappa's death, in 1993. "Frank was a genius, a rebel," Flynt said. "And Frank and I in all our conversations had a very honest dialogue. We were never really out of sync politically or socially. There were always things to talk about, but never really anything to argue about." He hesitated, then added, shyly, "Frank really, really liked me a lot."

"Frank loved Larry!" Gail interjected. "Frank and Larry were kindred spirits."

The Zappas and Flynt shared a quirky but abiding interest in government. Frank, like Flynt, was a First Amendment absolutist. Both men, moreover, wanted to run for President. Flynt made a brief run in 1984, and Zappa, who had harbored the desire for many years, finally announced that he was going to run in 1991. He planned to use talk shows as his vehicle, but he became ill with prostate cancer and couldn't continue.

Frank's frustration at failing to fulfill his ambition led Gail, after his death, to think about becoming involved in politics herself, but on a more pragmatic level. Bill Clinton played a role, too: he was the first Presidential candidate in her adult life who had appealed to her. "It appeared that he had a sense of humor and didn't take himself too seriously," she said. "And he reminded me of Frank, in that he was really smart and perceptive and inclusive. You sense a compassion in him. It is a gift to be able to see the suffering that people endure—some people never see that someone else is suffering in some way. You know that he's seen it and knows what it feels like and doesn't forget that." None of the Clinton scandals have tarnished his image for her: his weaknesses only make him more human. (She also notes that from her years in rock and roll, as the wife of a bandleader, she knows something about forgiveness.) "I think the bottom line is that Clinton looks more like us than any other President we've had, and that's why we find the most fault with him," she asserted.

Listening to Gail talk about Clinton lends further resonance to the popular notion that what is being played out in the Clinton-impeachment process is in large part a cultural war that started some thirty years ago. If that is indeed why Clinton enrages so many Republicans, it is not surprising that he would have the opposite effect on someone like Gail Zappa. Notwithstanding her recent immersion in mainstream politics, she remains incontrovertibly out on the edge. And for her the battle lines were drawn long ago.



What do these men have in common? Gail Zappa loves them both.

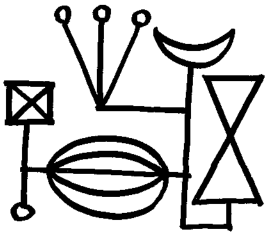
STEVE BRODNER

GAIL lives in a house in Laurel Canyon, which she and Frank bought in 1968 and, over the years, kept adding on to. It is appropriately Zappa-esque in its flouting of architectural convention and its celebration of whimsy. Constructed on numerous levels with different entrances, it makes its way with unexpected turns through disparate parts that seem barely to cohere, and is sufficiently mazelike that, after my second extended visit, I had to struggle to find my way out. There is a library with animals painted on the ceiling and a Japanese koi pond painted on the floor, and a sitting room with leopard-print-covered furniture, and a foyer with a pink wall, and a living room that is never used. The kitchen—the last add-on, oddly shaped, so as not to disturb a towering jacaranda tree in the yard—is the largest room in the house, and the place where everyone (family members, friends, the four Zappa cats) ends up.

As we drank chai, the latest West Coast craze, one afternoon, Gail told me that both her father and Frank's had been scientists (her father was a research physicist in the military, and his was a meteorologist), and both families moved frequently; but, once Gail and Frank were on their own, each independently gravitated to Los Angeles. "There's so much light in L.A.," Gail said. "And there are a lot of people in L.A. who are in search of the thing they like to do the best. They just know they want to have a life where they're doing something that they really like doing, and that no one else is making them do." Indeed, she said, the four Zappa children—Moon, Dweezil, Ahmet, and Diva—all live here and are all following creative pursuits. All of them, moreover, finished their formal schooling by the age of sixteen; Gail does not expect that to hinder them in any way.

Gail is convinced that she and Frank were destined to spend their lives together, but she recalls that their initial encounter was not auspicious. It occurred in 1966, shortly after "Freak Out!"—the first album of his band, the Mothers of Invention—had been issued. That record, with its liner-note explanation of "freaking out" as "a process whereby an individual casts off outmoded and restricting standards of thinking, dress, and social etiquette in order to express creatively his relationship to his immediate environment," had an enormous effect on a small but receptive audience. Matt Groening, the "Simpsons" creator, told me recently that Zappa had been his idol from that moment on. He'd been struck by Zappa's outrageous humor and by his eclecticism—Zappa's music grew out of not just rock, blues, and jazz but, particularly, the achievements of Edgard Varèse and Igor Stravinsky. And Zappa, for all his provocative eccentricity, disdained the mindless conformity of the psychedelic-hippie phenomenon. Groening, for one, took heart from Zappa's message that "you could be a weirdo but didn't have to do drugs."

Gail, however, hadn't heard "Freak Out!" when she went with a friend to a gathering at Zappa's house. "A couple of people at the party were so bizarre-looking," she recalls. "Frank didn't have a shirt on, and he had these bell-bottom pants that were too short, and they were made out of cotton piqué. And they weren't hip-huggers—they were actually waisted, which was crazy, because they looked like something your mother might wear on a bad day. Not my mother but someone's mother. They were white cotton piqué and had brilliant-red hibiscus flowers all over them. And the shoes! These weird tennis shoes that looked way too long for his feet but they weren't. It was sort of like Donald Duck: he had enormously long feet, and because the pants were so short and the shoes were so long, and he was so weird—no one walked like him—he looked like he was a puppet, almost touching the ground. Everything he did was in some sort of peculiar rhythm of his own—it was very different from everyone else's." She left the party early.



On their second meeting, she said, it "took." The next morning, she recalls, "I rolled over and I saw one eye, over the edge of the pillow, and, the moment I saw that, I heard a voice. I'd heard voices all my life—it was probably my voice, but I was young and didn't realize that. I thought it was coming from somewhere else. And it said, 'This is it. If you can't accept this, we're never talking to you again.' And I remember thinking, Oh, my God! Here's this guy, I think he's extraordinary, it's such a different sensation! I know he hasn't taken a bath in four months, and his mustache smells like peanut butter, and a whole lot of other stuff I don't even want to discuss—you know?" She laughed, and added, "But I thought, Well, O.K. So, I think that's the same thing as love at first sight."

THE Zappas' first serious experience with mainstream politics was not a happy one. In 1985, Frank testified at a record-label hearing before the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. The hearing, conducted by Senator Al Gore, among others, had been promoted by the Parents Music Resource Center, or P.M.R.C., whose leaders were Gore's wife, Tipper, and Susan Baker, the wife of Treasury Secretary James Baker III. Frank, who began his testimony by reading the First Amendment, called Tipper Gore, Susan Baker, and their committee "a group of bored Washington housewives," and declared that the list of P.M.R.C. demands "reads like an instruction manual for some sinister kind of 'toilet-training program' to housebreak all composers and performers because of the lyrics of a few." And he added, "Ladies, how dare you!"

"The original concept was to label records 'O' for occult, 'X' for explicit, 'V' for violent, and 'D/A' for drugs and alcohol," Gail recalls. "Frank's point was that, once you start doing that, you're labelling an individual—you're saying this is an obscene person—and it's just your interpretation, and people are writing lyrics for their own group, for themselves, as a thirty-five- or forty-year-old person, and what the hell does that have to do with a mythical thirteen-year-old who might listen to it?"

Later that year, Frank released an album entitled "Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention." One selection, "Porn Wars," includes recordings of various voices at the P.M.R.C. hearing. On the album, the future Vice-President tells Frank that, although he disagrees with some of Frank's statements, "I have been a fan of your music, believe it or not. And I respect you as a true original and a tremendously talented musician." Senator Ernest Hollings, for his part, refers to some lyrics as "outrageous filth," and says, "If I could find some way constitutionally to do away with it I would." For years, Frank had been urging his fans to go to the polls, and this album's liner notes exhorted, "Register to vote before it's too late!"

Zappa was no stranger to censorship, albeit of an informal type: his lyrics were rarely heard on American radio. In the early eighties, furthermore, after a protracted lawsuit with his label over control of his master recordings, he was financially strapped. Frank was the certified genius in the family (for example, he couldn't be bothered waiting in line at the D.M.V., and had to be driven everywhere by his wife); Gail saw to the practicalities of daily life. In 1983, she decided to start a mail-order business to bolster the family finances. "I took all the boxes of fan letters that we'd never answered, and I typed up names and addresses, and I did a mailing. I think we had about six thousand names. We sent out a little postcard that had the logo of the record company on it and that said, 'Would you like to buy a T-shirt?' The response was overwhelming! So I was suddenly stuffing T-shirts in bags and putting stamps on them on the floor of my living room for weeks on end, but the money was coming in. Eventually, we started selling records that way as well."

Most artists make deals in which the record company pays them an advance and assumes responsibility for everything required to bring a record to the public (recording, manufacturing, distribution, promotion), and then the company, after reimbursing itself for all those costs (and fees) from the record's profits, pays the artist royalties. Gail realized that, by operating independently, she and Frank could, essentially, collect the record-company share. Their company prospered. Gail says, "We never advertised, and we were servicing, ultimately, on a regular basis, between fifty thousand and seventy thousand customers. Other musicians wanted the big advances, the artists' deals, the promotions, the touring—everything that goes with it. But this way you have control. Otherwise, you don't get to play your music the way you want to play it. People were afraid of Frank, because he didn't hold back, and he didn't compromise himself in any way, artistically or in terms of his own perspective. It's so absurd, you know. We were very, very patriotic—grateful to be in the country whose chief export, apart from everything else, was democracy, but stunned by the fact that most people didn't appreciate it. They were too busy trying to make rules to swallow it up, and were not thinking about what happens when you do that."

In 1990, in Prague, Frank met Vaclav Havel, the newly elected President of Czechoslovakia. Since the sixties, Zappa's music had been smuggled behind the Iron Curtain; his song "Plastic People" had become an underground anthem, and he had been considered an arch-enemy of the Communist state. Indeed, Havel has said that Zappa was one of his greatest influences. Now he asked Zappa to become Czechoslovakia's ambassador to the West for trade, culture, and tourism, but the appointment was opposed by Secretary of State Baker, and Zappa quietly withdrew.

("They told Havel he could have a relationship with the U.S. or he could have one with Frank Zappa," Gail says.) According to the columnist Jack Anderson, Baker was "carrying an old grudge" from Zappa's attack on his wife as a "bored housewife."

Baker's grudge may have pushed the Zappas toward the Democrats in the 1992 election, despite Al Gore's place on the ticket. Matt Groening recalls Gail's telling a friend at the time who was critical of the Party, "Well, the Democrats may be reinventing the wheel, but the Republicans are reinventing the swastika."

When Frank died, the following year, Gail received a letter from Clinton and also one from the Gores. "It was immediate," she recalled, "and I was so moved. Clinton, especially, was recognizing Frank as an artist, and recognizing what he contributed to a free society, which was still struggling with what its version of freedom was." The Gores' letter persuaded Gail that when Gore had expressed his regard for Frank at the hearing—something that, at the time, she and Frank thought might be disingenuous—he had been sincere after all. In August, 1995, soon after she had donated a hundred thousand dollars to the Democratic National Committee, she was introduced to Gore at a coffee for about ten people in the Map Room of the White House. "I went to one of those infamous White House breakfasts—which, at the time, who knew?" she said, referring to the subsequent Justice Department investigations into campaign-finance activities. Of the meeting, she said, "It felt like family to me. He's a very warm and wonderful and responsive person. His public persona is not the way he is in a small group of people. I see the humor completely. And the powerful intellect is there."

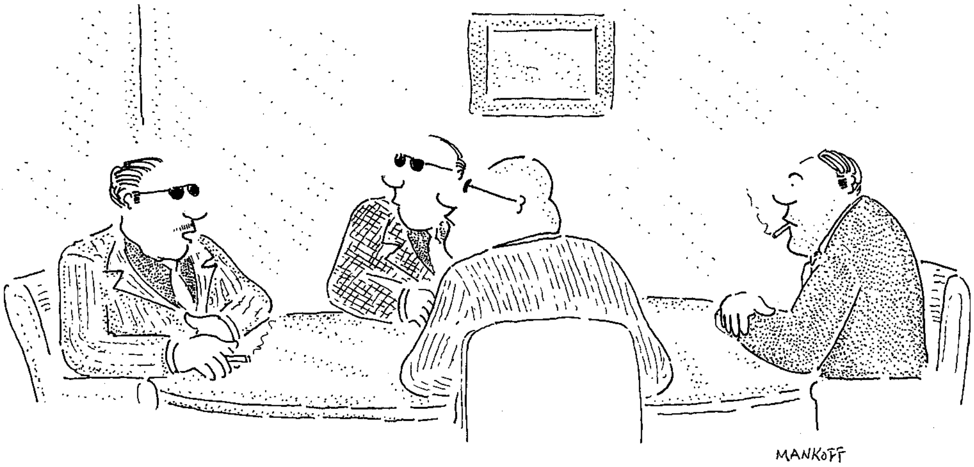
It may be that there has never been an insider who was quite such an outsider as Gail Zappa. Ari Swiller, a Democratic fundraiser during the '96 campaign, commented recently that most large donors appear to be motivated "either by their business interests or by their desire to be close to power, their love of the limelight," and he went on, "I've got hundreds of calls—'My seat isn't good enough! I'm not seated at the Vice-President's table!' From Gail, never. She shows up in a schmatte, not looking to impress anyone." Swiller then said that when groups of donors meet with Gore the meetings are usually boring, because everyone is so guarded. "Not Gail! She says what she thinks. She is who she is. And the whole family is that way. Ahmet shaves his head and wears funny clothes, and there are pictures of him with the President where Ahmet's making funny faces. Who does that? There's no rein on them."

A potential rein might be Gail's accountant, Gary Iskowitz, who insists that she has been giving at a level disproportionate to her wealth. "It's like there's a neon sign in front of the Zappa house: 'Come and get it!'" Because she is so generous, Iskowitz says, and because she doesn't make the kinds of demands that other major contributors do, she tends to be taken advantage of by political operatives. "They nickel-and-dime her. She gave more than two hundred thousand in 1997. Then, 'The President's coming to town!' It's not 'Come, be our guest' but 'Come—for another five thousand.'" Last year, Gail was one of Gray Davis's major supporters in his successful bid to become governor of California. She contributed thirty thousand dollars herself, raised thousands more from her friends, and stuck with him even when he was all but counted out in the primary. But she wasn't among the guests at his Inaugural.

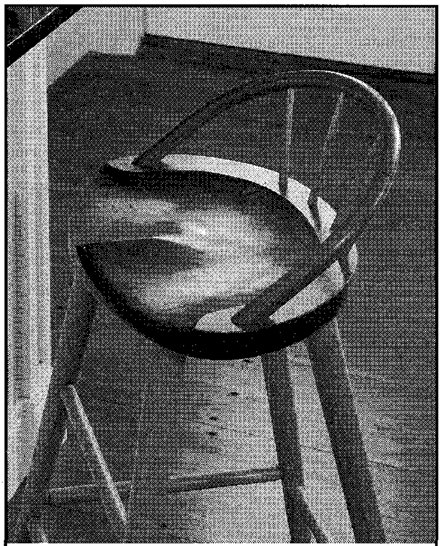
Gail knows that fellow-members of the élite club of major donors regard her as an oddity: in her kitchen there is a photograph of her, Dweezil, and President Clinton at a fund-raising event held in the kind of palatial residence so characteristic of L.A. that it seems almost ordinary. The host, visible in the background, is eying them darkly. "We call that 'The Photo of the Evil Lurker,'" she told me, laughing. Yet, referring to what she perceives as a general attitude toward her in Democratic circles these days, she went on, "I know why they're handling me with kid gloves—it's because I always make it a point to say how much I admire Larry." Flynt, of course, was anathematized even further by the Democrats after last week's outing of another congressman. "Everyone runs away from him," Gail says. "But I feel I have an obligation—because he's devoted to the process and devoted to the Party." Gail told me, too, that when a fund-raiser called her recently she said, in exasperation, "Look, I don't have deep pockets, and I only have one friend with deep pockets. And one of these days one of you guys is going to have balls big enough to meet with him!"

Someday, she hopes, Clinton himself might do just that. Perhaps when this war is over. She says that, through all the vicissitudes of the Lewinsky battles, she has never lost faith that Clinton will prevail. "I just see him as being on a spiritual mission. That's what I see—it emanates out of every pore. I feel that nothing can stop it."

Indeed, she used the occasion of a Democratic fund-raiser last year to convey her insight to Clinton personally. She knew he was being bombarded with advice from his strategists on how to survive, but her counsel was different. "Mr. President," she said. "All you have to do is breathe." ♦



"This 'digital revolution'—can we muscle in on that?"



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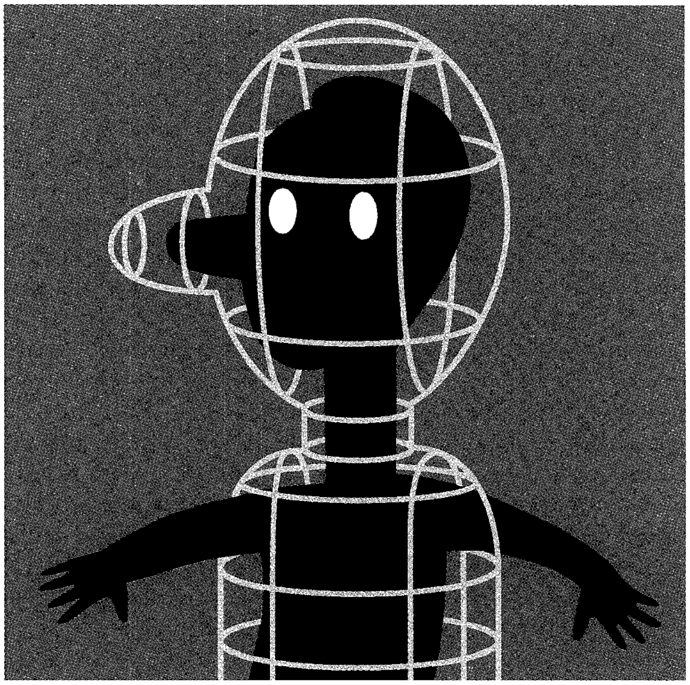
BY CHARLIE VARON & JIM ROSENAU

IF you've never experienced a merger, you may have apprehensions about working for a company headquartered in a distant galaxy. Let us assure you that our company has completed more than 9^{23} successful mergers and acquisitions. Think of the process as a respectful melding of equals, rather than, say, an "alien invasion." We feel your pain.™

While you were reading the last paragraph, we scanned the contents of your hard drive and learned a great deal about you. You are what we on the Home Planet call a Type 9 employee: energetic but high-strung, fickle, quick to blame others. Given these traits, you are being reassigned to the Human Resources Department.



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

- Press the ENTER key now.

Congratulations! Your Valued Employee Number is as follows:

8.6107.00.a8

- Proceed now to the machine shop to have this number embossed on your forehead.
- Now touch the MOUSE lightly.

Welcome back! Did you know that the company you now work for began as a small family business handcrafting one-of-a-kind items for a cherished clientele? That today, with branches on eighty-nine planets, we still practice old-fashioned values of thrift, self-reliance, and nepotism? That before leaving the Home Planet, all supervisors must attend training sessions designed to instill appreciation for the contributions of inferior beings?

- Now press the TAB key.
- Proceed to Human Resources, 324th Floor.
- Hello again! Now please type the word TABOO.

The following foods are now forbidden on the premises: corn nuts, corn chips, maize, corn tortillas, cornflakes, grits, polenta, popcorn (both microwave and analog), corn bread, acorn squash, and acorns. Sticky foods are allowed with written permission from your supervisor.

- Now type the word USAGE.

Effective immediately, the personal pronouns "he" and "she" are being replaced with our word 000398, which is gender neutral and fun to say. It is a favorite word on the Home Planet and has many meanings, much like the English word "two/too/to."

- Practice saying 000398 a few times, then type the word RESPECT.

What evokes "laughter" in some has a hurtful effect on others. We are aware of the circulation of a "humorous" E-mail message disparaging incoming personnel from the Home Planet. You received this message yesterday at 11:17:33 E.S.T. and by 13:42:49 had forwarded it to forty-seven other recipients.

Henceforth, "jokes" about Home Planet personnel, their appearance, degree of viscosity, or means of motility are permissible only if preapproved by your overseer.

- Press the F6 key to indicate your agreement with the above, then type the word INSTALL.

Time sheets are being replaced with chrono/motion/brain-wave sensors, found in the packet marked "A."

- Carefully following the onscreen diagram, implant sensors at temple, wrist, and jowl. Return surgical glue and bone saw to nurse, 141st Floor.
- When you are ready, type the word WELLNESS.

Your workplace has been sprayed with health-enhancing microörganisms from the Home Planet. Once illness subsides to an acceptable level (estimated time: two to four Earth "months"), medical benefits will terminate and be replaced with Friday-evening socials. In the interim, if you experience nausea, toothache, soft-tissue injuries, etc., please see the receptionist. She keeps Tylenol in the top right drawer.

- Now type the word TEAMWORK.

Since the Company commenced its Earth operations last month, we have observed that some humans work hard and play by the rules.™ Others are not so industrious.

- Please list three of your co-workers who strike you as lazy, inefficient, or slow-witted.
- Ninety seconds have passed. Please enter the names now.

Processing . . .
<Bill Gates> is not a current employee.
<Leonard Nimoy> is not a current employee.
<Lizzie Borden> is not a current employee.

- Please enter valid names now.

Processing . . .
Confirming Employee IDs . . .
Cross-checking . . .

Interestingly enough, you were the fifth human to list <Teresa Grobinza>. At this time, the Company will terminate <Teresa Grobinza>'s employment. Thanks for your coöperation!

- To contribute three dollars to a farewell gift for <Teresa Grobinza>, press the ESC key.
- Type the word MORALE.

We are interested in how our employees "feel" about working for the Company.

Thrilled
Fervent
Jazzed
Psyched
Raring-to-go
Optimistic
Pumped

- From the above list, choose a word and say it aloud.

Your voiceprint does not match the normative profile for <Raring-to-go>. It ranks in just the fifth percentile for enthusiasm. Remember, you must maintain an enthusiasm ranking in the thirtieth percentile or above to be eligible for continued employment. In a moment, we'll give you a chance to re-record. Perhaps the following will enhance your performance. . . .

Did you know that the Company is a leader in Equal Opportunity Employment? While we do not use quotas, we tolerate no discrimination based on physical characteristics, planet of origin, or allegiance to historically disadvantaged sports franchises. We vigorously recruit from all phyla and, whenever possible, hire those who seem down on their luck and could use a break.

- Ready to try saying <Raring-to-go> again?

Congratulations! The soft chime indicates that your enthusiasm ranking (thirty-third percentile) qualifies you for employment through at least next Tuesday!

NOTE: If your enthusiasm level stabilizes at or above the sixty-fifth percentile, you'll be automatically enrolled in the Company's coffee-sharing plan, entitling you to up to three cups of "java" per workday. Human employees who maintain enthusiasm above the eightieth percentile are selected for management training, and those ranking above the ninety-fifth percentile are invited to mate with the Company Founder. 000398 loves humans! ♦

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ANNALS OF CONSUMPTION

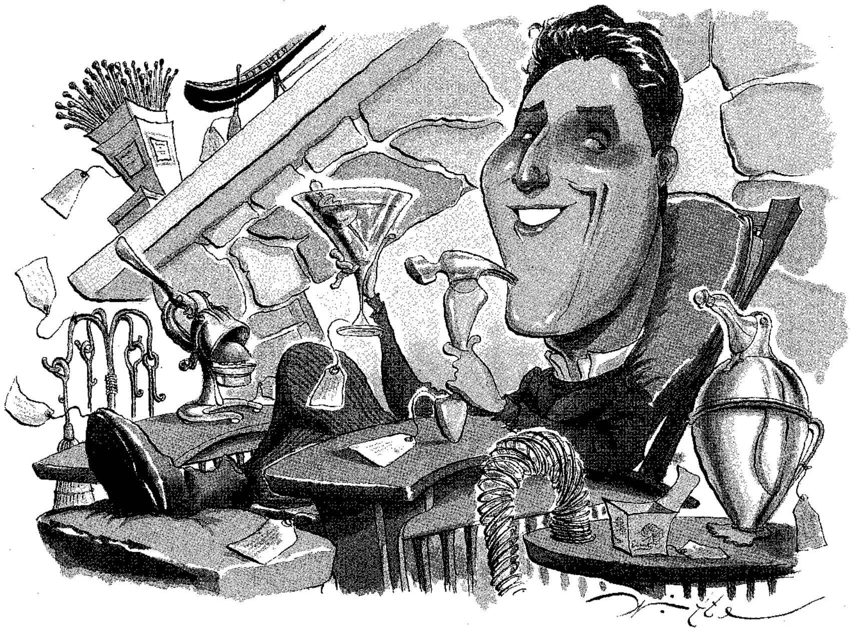
ACQUIRED TASTE

A fast-growing hardware chain sells olive picks, crystal radios, and spiritual redemption.

BY DAVID BROOKS

Up until this minute, I didn't even know that it was possible to have good taste in dustpans. But I am standing in front of one of the world's finest dustpans—admiring its capacious, open-mouth design, its sturdy metal construction, the elegant horsehair of the accompanying brush—and I can't tell you how much I yearn for it. If I owned this dustpan, I would be the sort of person I want to be. I'd take the time to appreciate the beauty of everyday objects. I'd inhabit a world of simple craftsmanship, not of mass-produced clutter. I'd be one of those rare souls who have so much cultivation to spare that they can be thoughtful even about their cleaning equipment.

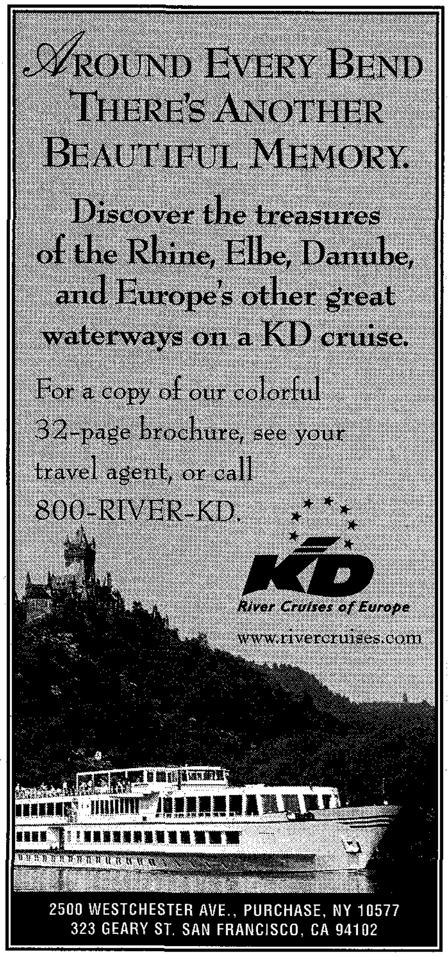
I've come across this admirable dustpan in a store called Restoration Hardware. And on my way to the sales desk I look around and there's so much else I want. I want the ribbed steel flashlights I remember from summer camp. I want the red casino dice. I want the soft leather chair that is an exact replica of the one Teddy Roosevelt took with him on long train trips. I want the old-fashioned kazoo, the mission-style magazine rack, the Moon Pies that I didn't even know were still made, the Biedermeier-urn table lamp, the glass-and-steel Pyrex beakers just like the ones my doctor used to keep the tongue depressors in.



Stephen Gordon has turned his childhood memories into nostalgic inventory.

MICHAEL WITTE

I'm no novice when it comes to precious yuppie consumerism. I've done J. Peterman, Smith & Hawken, and Williams-Sonoma. But the selection at Restoration Hardware has aroused the curatorial greed even in a Stickley-hardened veteran like me, and I am not alone. Four years ago, Restoration had just five stores, in California. Now the company is thriving, with sixty-five outlets nationwide, including a massive new flagship store in Manhattan, at Broadway and Twenty-second Street. It plans to open thirty more stores in 1999, continuing a rate of expansion that could eventually make it the Starbucks of home furnishings. If you are a college-educated person between thirty-five and fifty-five, with a household income above seventy-five thousand dollars, you might as well just surrender



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your Visa card now, because sooner or later you're going to find yourself traipsing up to a Restoration cash register aglow at the prospect of owning a pair of mammoth black suède fireplace gloves.

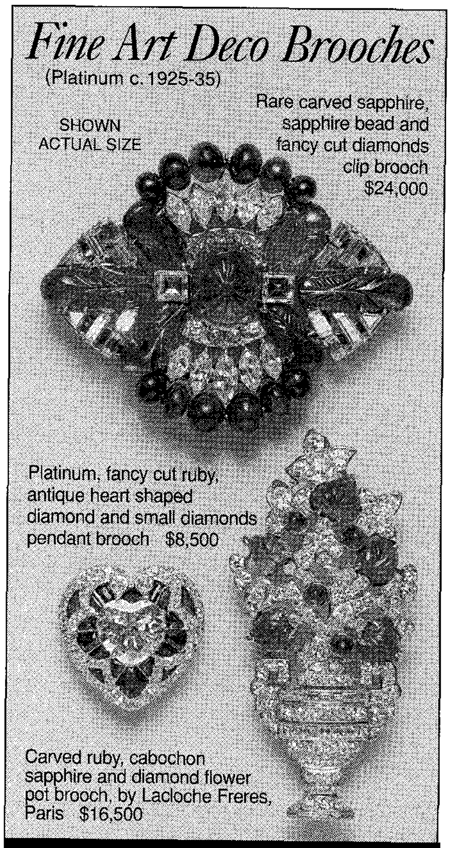
Of course, the shopping malls are stuffed with sensibility-drenched stores catering to upscale professionals. They tend to have Louis Armstrong singing "What a Wonderful World" on the sound system, French-café posters on the walls, and deceptively rustic names. But, even compared with its competitors, like Pottery Barn and Crate & Barrel, Restoration Hardware is unusual. It isn't organized by product categories, with fifty lamps in one section and a variety of plates and glasses stacked up in another. Instead, it has gone further than just about any other store in organizing itself around a particular life style. If you happen to like the atmosphere of long-lost American craftsmanship which Restoration exudes, the store gives you the squeegee, the bathtub, the hand lotion, the doorknobs, the chocolate syrup, the ginger ale, and the hand-forged scissors that go with it. In fact, hardware accounts for only seventeen per cent of Restoration's sales; thirty per cent is furniture, and much of the rest is spread among hundreds of category-smashing items, like mint-flavored tennis balls that will freshen your dog's breath while he fetches. And wandering amid the whole array will be the customers—little groups of highly educated Java Jacket people in their alumni sweatshirts oohing and ahing over the unusual items and quirky juxtapositions.

Restoration Hardware customers aren't drawn from a wide demographic. There are few droopy-jeans contractors looking for power tools. (The store has no power tools.) This is hardware for the lords of the service sector. It's the basic PBS-NPR cohort: vineyard-touring doctors, novel-writing lawyers, tenured gardening buffs, unusually literary realtors, dangly-earringed foundation officials, and the rest of us information-age burghers. In fact, the company's success is testimony to the increasing size and cohesiveness of the educated class. Restoration's customer base correlates to education level even more closely than to income. And the chain has been able to expand into one upscale suburb after another without running out of graduate-degreed shoppers willing to be delighted by the J. Kerouac Moving Blanket, the plastic-ball-valve dripless fat baster, William Morris recliners, delicate wire-mesh French flyswatters, and endless quantities of Adirondack chairs.

Not surprisingly for a company this dense with Zeitgeist, Restoration Hardware is based in Marin County, California. It's somehow fitting that the same county that had half of America worshipping crystals in the seventies has us fetishizing kitchen fixtures in the nineties. Restoration's headquarters are in an office park in Corte Madera, just up Highway 101 from Sausalito. The work area there is furnished with standard-issue gray modular office furniture, along with just a few upholstered sofas from the stores. The staff is young and mostly female, and includes plenty of liberal-arts majors hired away from other educated-class retailers. During the job interviews, they're asked to describe their own home furnishings, to make sure they have appropriately informal but classic tastes. The dress code is brunch casual; the staff people joke that when they get together in one room it looks like a Gap catalogue come to life. "We're kind of loose," they insist over and over again when you phone to make an appointment: don't worry about being a little late, don't dress up. Some of the employees bring their dogs to work, so there are little condo dogs wandering from room to room.

I walked in one day, and the buyers were just bursting out of one of their merchandise meetings, giddy about the Aqua-Troll. This is an eighteen-inch-tall plastic troll with a sprinkler inside. When you attach a hose and turn on the water, his head pops up, and he douses your yard. Twice a week, the buyers bring favored items to these meetings, and try to show why they would fit in at Restoration. When it comes time to make a decision, everybody gets a vote, but, in keeping with the tenor of today's educated-class workplaces (which tend to be officially egalitarian, but are actually dominated by one charismatic leader), the decisive vote is cast by Restoration's founder, C.E.O., and visionary, Stephen Gordon.

Gordon wears his power and newfound wealth lightly. He's a casual, unaffected forty-seven-year-old, who, in fact, looks a little like the whimsical Aqua-Troll. He's achingly sincere about



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his products and mellow with his colleagues, who seem to revere him, praising him over and over for being "loose" and "real"—words that appear to be the supreme compliments at the headquarters. As a sort of Baby Boomer Everyman, he has no need for market research; his key to success is to fill his stores with the things he craves.

CONTENTS OF A MINUTE

The woman across the hall
is dying. She talks herself into death
with a low rapid jumble.
A rich African voice is talking
over hers. It speaks of *green*
as in *pastures*; *still*, as in *waters*.
A high clamor of geese falls
through the dusk, taking a flock south.
Geese are gone. And the woman.
Elsewhere, the wind
blows in from left field.

—JOSEPHINE JACOBSEN

Gordon was born in 1951, in the upstate New York town of Plattsburgh, on Lake Champlain. It was a small industrial town, with a state college, an Air Force facility, and, as Gordon remembers it, a fairly rigid class structure. His father's income as a shoe-store owner put the Gordon family squarely in the middle class, but his mother's sophisticated cultural tastes encouraged them to aim higher. While Gordon was growing up, he was never allowed to work with his father in the shoe store. "I was supposed to do something better than be in retail," he says.

Protestant grandees used to build summer lodges in the Adirondacks near Plattsburgh; it was where an earlier generation of East Coast aristocrats would go to get simplified. And this world of "Wasp graciousness," as Gordon puts it, was what fired his ambitions. Even today, he says, he feels a kinship with what he knows of Ralph Lauren. They were two ambitious boys who longed for the world of slow, croquet-dabbled afternoons. But Gordon is younger than Ralph Lauren, and nobody who came of age in the late sixties can have uncomplicated feelings about the Protestant establishment. He went off to college at New Jersey's Drew University at the height of the Vietnam War and became an active, if internally divided, member of radical student groups. One day, a group he was with organized a protest rally in nearby Morristown, where they stood outside various office buildings and shouted "Pigs!" at the people trying to get to work. "I had such conflict," Gordon recalls. "Part of me had this incredibly ambitious side that I was afraid of expressing. I really wanted to succeed. I had this feeling of 'Gosh, can't you let me get squared away and make it before we trash the system?'"

A few years later, with a couple of degrees in psychology, Gordon became a counsellor near Eureka, California, which was then a funky Victorian seaport town between the redwoods and the ocean in Northern California. Succumbing to "entrepreneurial thoughts," as he recounts, he bought a Queen Anne house, and set out to turn it into a bed-and-breakfast. But he couldn't find a retail supplier for the fixtures he needed to restore the place, and in 1979, sensing a market niche, he began selling knobs and gadgets to the other urban refugees who were migrating to Eureka to realize their restoration fantasies.

Soon Gordon found, as all members of the educated class must, that this job wasn't merely a way to make a living—it was a means of self-expression. He began stocking quirky items that had nothing to do with hardware but simply appealed to him. To guide customers through the eclectic mixture of products, Gordon began writing little signs. His company has grown, but Restoration still has a little sign posted next to each item, and Gordon still writes all the texts himself—more than nine hundred descriptions, according to a staffer who bothered to count. Between about a hundred and four hundred words long, each sign describes the lineage of the item, or the memories and pensées it provokes. "Traditional furniture stores never really took a stand," Gordon says. That's probably because they didn't realize they had to. Gordon's signs are intimate, self-revelatory, and grammatically erratic, like the "Staff's Favorites" tags one finds at independent bookstores. They evoke the earlier age of simple family traditions which is Restoration's paradise lost. "My mother always set our dinner table with salt cellars on very special occassions [sic]," Gordon writes in a sign that accompanies a pair of cut-glass cellars with silver spoons which he sells for twelve dollars. "Growing up I didn't see many other families setting the table with these delightful little vessels yet I vividly remember (call me quirky) visiting my then girlfriend's home in upstate New York and her mother, Marjorie, had salt cellars. This was my senior year in college and I thought this perhaps yet another reason I should bond with the woman who is now my wife."

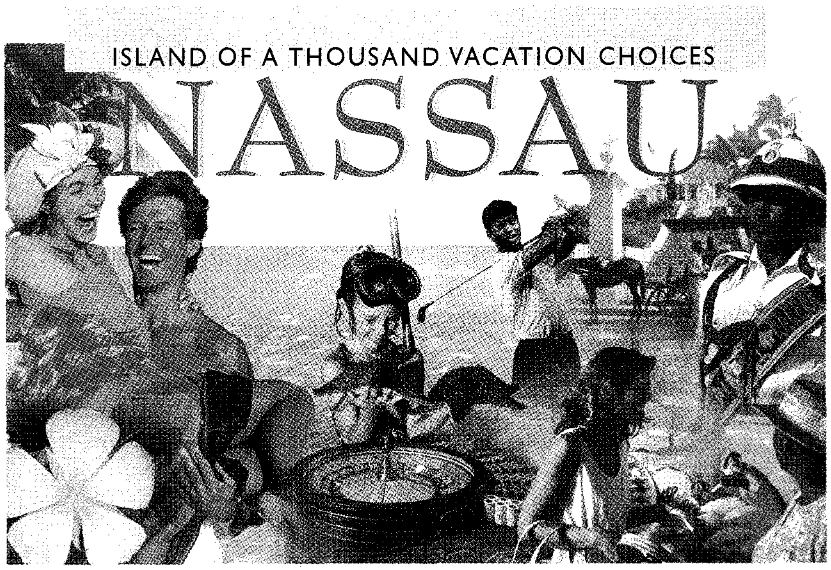
Gordon has ransacked his childhood tactile memories and turned them into nostalgic inventory. He sells a replica of the chair that his third-grade teacher sat on back at the Elm Street School in Plattsburgh. He sells the old classic Boston Ranger pencil sharpener, which you probably haven't seen in decades. He sells vintage gyroscopes, old crystal-radio kits like the ones he used to build, and the compartmentalized school-lunch trays we all used to slide along the cafeteria serving lines—at four dollars a tray, they are one of Restoration's fast movers. (People tend to buy them for their kids to eat on at home; a salesperson at one of the stores told me that parents buy fifteen or twenty at a time and use them at birthday parties.) He sells Quackenbush nut bowls like the ones his Aunt Shirley and Uncle Jim used to serve walnuts to their guests.

Nor does Gordon stint when it comes to evocations of his other youthful infatuation, rich Protestants. Beneath all the offbeat items that catch your eye at first glance—the foot duvets, the dog-biscuit mix for people who bake their own—there is also a line of furniture and furnishings that wouldn't be out of place among the non-health-conscious grandees at the Knickerbocker Club.

There's the Morgan Leather Club Chair, the Cirque Lounge Ice Bucket, the Hotel Royale Silver Plated Olive Picks to adorn your Martinis, and the 1936 Penguin Cocktail Shakers. When Gordon can't find Wasp gentility, he creates it. Recently, he became enamored of fireplace matches. He found some eleven-inch matches with charcoal-black heads which were so richly textured that they looked like beautiful wool when they were bunched together. He packaged them in a clean white box—not in a normal quantity of, say, fifty but in a bounteous collection of three hundred and sixty, which is probably more fireplace matches than most families need in a decade. And then he made up a name for them, Jenson-Baines Fireplace Matches, so they sound like a Mayflower-descended Beacon Hill law firm. And as you cruise through the store you find numerous other items that have been given suspiciously perfect Wasp names: the Jameson Tray Top Coffee Table, the Connaught Pedestal Soap Dish, and Jemson Pillar Plates. In the world that Restoration restores, upper-class traditionalism mixes effortlessly with proletarian authenticity. It's a classless utopia, in which a workman's wrench can be displayed alongside a yachtsman's log.

THIS sensibility didn't emerge all at once, and it didn't take off immediately. Gordon worked as a merchant at his store in Eureka for a full ten years, dreaming of expansion. Finally, in the early nineties, he opened three stores in the Bay Area, and then, with the help of some outside investors, expanded into Southern California, and into Phoenix and Portland. More outside capital flowed in, allowing more expansion, and this past summer Restoration completed an initial public offering, raising just under seventy-five million dollars for further growth. Some New Age entrepreneurs experience crises of conscience when their start-up boutiques go corporate. But Gordon, no small-is-beautiful romantic, has had few apprehensions about running a big company. His office is decorated with pictures taken inside a private jet he rented while he was pitching Restoration to investment banks prior to the I.P.O.

The director of Restoration's catalogue division is a woman named Marta Benson, who graduated with a degree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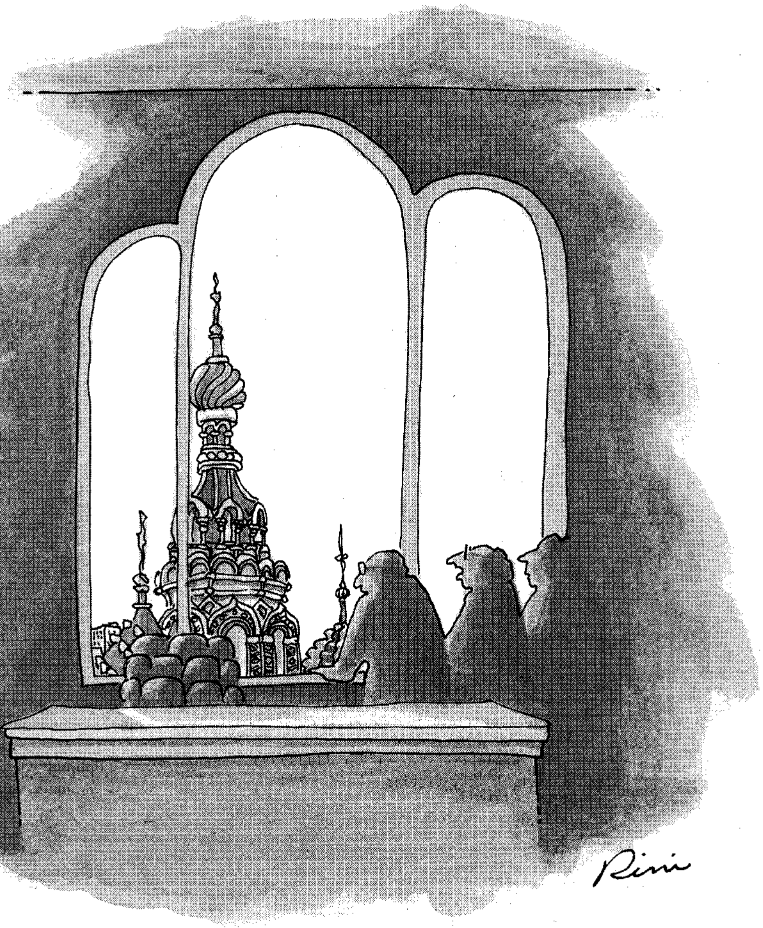
in philosophy from Wesleyan College, in Connecticut, in 1984. "I'm proud of being a merchant," she says. Restoration people envelop the word "merchant" with spiritual resonance, the way some people use the word "poet" or "sculptor." "I went to see 'The English Patient' a couple of years ago," Benson recalls, "and it was so moving and so beautiful, and I thought, All I do is sell stuff. But I'm reconciled to it, because I'm selling stuff that has meaning."

The Restoration buyers frequently call manufacturers and plead with them to revive classic lines they have abandoned—the sturdy old-fashioned metal fans they used to make instead of the flimsy modern plastic ones, the classic plaid thermoses instead of the flashy pink ones. While I was sitting in Marta Benson's small office one day, she leaped up from her chair to demonstrate what is wrong with American retailing. She bounded over to a shelf where she keeps items that are being considered for Restoration's catalogue, and held up a small wooden brush with white bristles, which was wrapped in a cardboard-and-plastic package and looked like any brush you might find at the local discount drugstore. "Look at that!" she exclaimed contemptuously, holding up the cheesy plastic bag and the gaudy pink-and-purple label stapled on top. "What were they thinking?" She ripped off the cardboard label and threw away the plastic. "Now look at this!" she said triumphantly, holding up the unadorned brush. The clean shape of the brush was revealed, along with the noble grain of the wood.

Here was the theology of Restoration Hardware made manifest. The single urge that unites Restoration's diverse products is repentance. The store's theory is that we as a society have sinned. In the sixties, the seventies, and, especially, the eighties, we worshipped the Golden Calf. We indulged in a consumption binge, filling our homes with mass-produced junk, trendy fashions, and showy luxuries. Now it's time to relearn old values, rediscover timeless furnishings. A year ago, the company produced a video for potential investors which neatly captures the chain's social



"Perhaps we could tell the international investment community that we're sorry."

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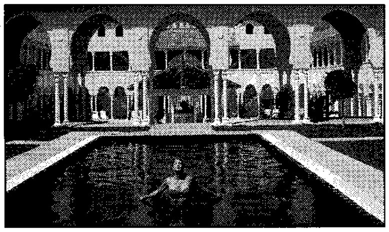

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vision. The voice-over explains, "Lurking in our collective unconscious, among images of Ike, Donna Reed, and George Bailey, is the very clear sense that things were once better made, that they mattered a little more." Images of the forties and fifties fill the screen. "What happened? Slowly but surely we became a nation obsessed with production and, of course, consumption." At this point, we see images of huge suburban developments, large outlet stores. "This was pretty heady and pretty good. We got so proficient at making things, we had unlimited choices and an endless array of goods." The "plastics" scene from "The Graduate" comes along. "The retail environment came to reflect this mentality—more square footage, more, more, more. Then, one day, the generation used to having everything recoiled, and became the generation searching for something."

Restoration evokes the places we have thoughtlessly abandoned: the small communities that ambitious people leave; the downtowns that have been hollowed out by car-friendly shopping malls; the local industrial crafts that are being driven out of business by our global economy; the old-fashioned family traditions we have neglected in the rush to be modern and mobile. Restoration reminds us that it is not too late to avoid the spiritual trap set by our relentless upward mobility. We can rediscover the essential things, and, best of all, we can do so while shopping.

OF course, the real world offers complications. As I was browsing in the Restoration store on University Avenue in Palo Alto recently, I saw a young lady get arrested. She was a dishevelled blond woman in a Disney T-shirt who seemed to be off her medication. She was following elderly women around the store and taunting them with "Hey, you rich bitch!" and "Where'd you learn to walk like that—at your fancy social events?" The store staff gently tried to persuade her to leave, but she kept harassing customers. Finally, the police were called. Two officers came in, and after some discussion they handcuffed her. She sat quietly on Restoration's velvet Zoe Sofa waiting for a police car.

Obviously, for all that Restoration renounces luxury and opulence, it can still arouse class resentments. If the crazy lady had been coherent, she could have argued that Restoration's virtuous simplicity is more exclusive than the straightforward gaudiness of, say, the Gilded Age. Anybody can make money and buy a Newport mansion. But it takes a lifetime of cultural training to navigate the unspoken sumptuary codes that guide educated-class tastes. These educated élites, the crazy lady could have pointed out, keep talking about the soul, but their spirituality begins to look like a status item, since it tends to manifest itself in pricey cocktail shakers and forty-dollar coffee-table books. Here are these hypocrites, she could have continued, who benefit from the wealth surge of the information-age economy and then build little faux-authentic chapels for themselves in their two-story great rooms. To an outsider like her, Restoration probably looks like a restricted educated-class country club: No Sensibility, No Service.

But the populist critique isn't entirely fair. For if the success of Restoration and similar upscale retailers proves anything it is that today's educated élite is fundamentally different from past élites. It's more anxious about its own affluence, and so seeks to spend its money to prove (to itself) that it hasn't been corrupted by materialism. This isn't a cohort bravely marching forward to assert its stamp on the future. It's an élite that looks backward, and seems to spend less energy on revolution or innovation than on cultural restoration. It's almost touching the way we Restoration Hardware browsers fetishize the artifacts of days gone by, pining for the old wisdom that our ancestors apparently possessed but that we feel we lack.

In a characteristic moment, Nietzsche mocked modern man by saying, "He needs history because it is the storage closet where all the costumes are kept. He notices that none really fits him." Perhaps Nietzsche is right. None of the old costumes fit. But maybe the dustpans do. Maybe the little salt-cellars can bring back the old traditions and the old virtues. And, anyway, at only twelve dollars it's worth a shot. ♦

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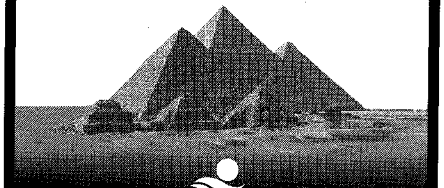

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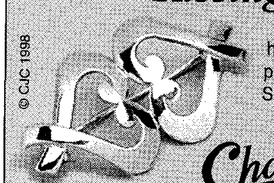

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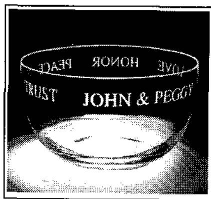

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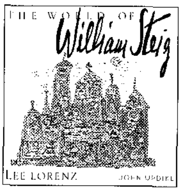

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LIFE AND LETTERS

MAKING WILLY LOMAN

Fifty years ago, Arthur Miller took American theatre into new territory. A look at his personal notebook reveals how he did it.

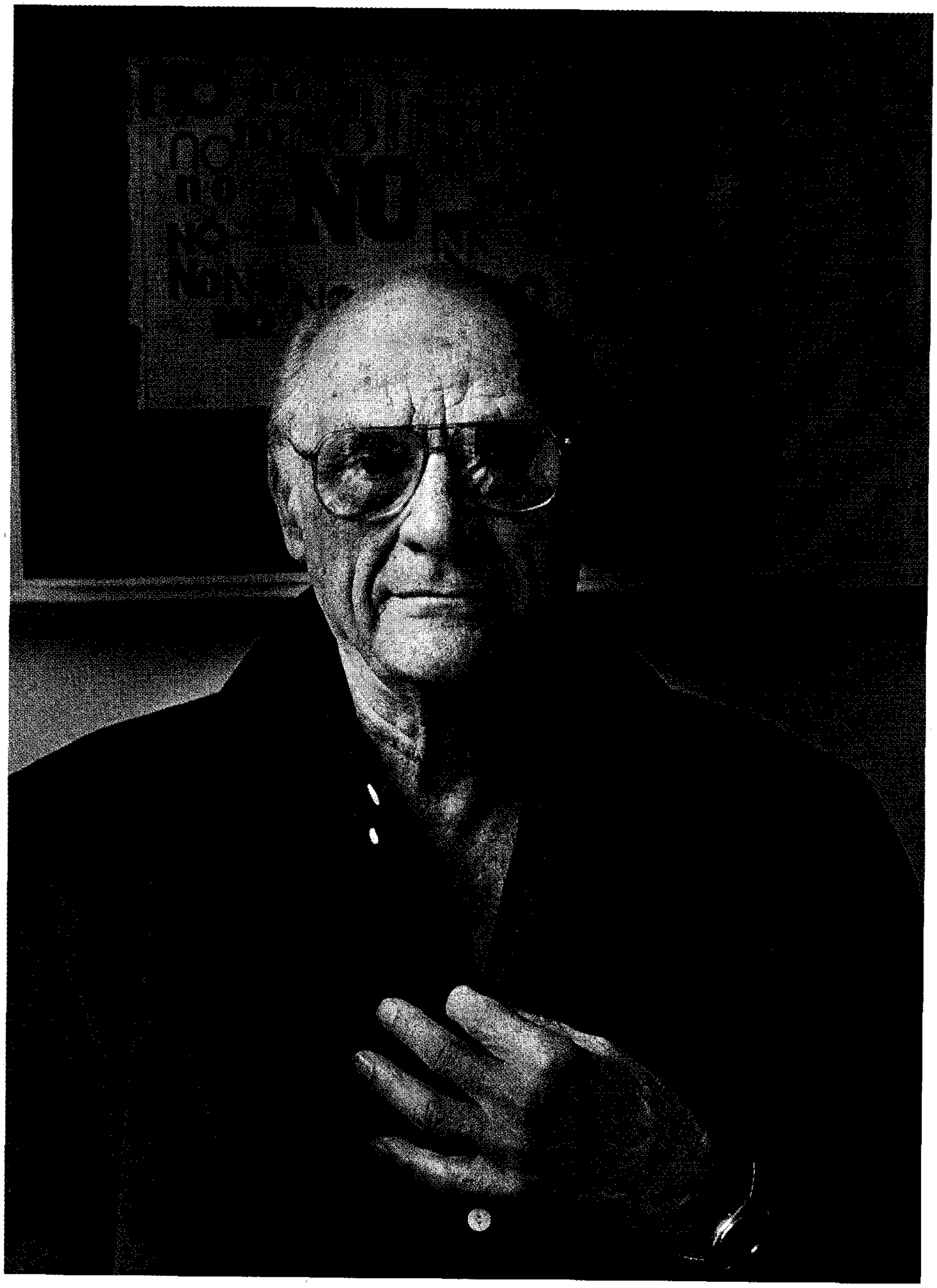
BY JOHN LAHR

On a crisp April weekend in 1948, Arthur Miller, then only thirty-three and enjoying the first flush of fame after the Broadway success the previous year of "All My Sons," waved goodbye to his first wife, Mary, and their two young kids, in Brooklyn, and set off for Roxbury, Connecticut, where he intended to build a cabin on a hillock just behind a Colonial house he had recently purchased for the family, which stood at the aptly named crossroads of Tophet (another name for Hell) and Gold Mine. "It was a purely instinctive act," Miller, who long ago traded up from that first forty-four-acre property to a four-hundred-acre spread on Painter Hill, a few miles down the road, told me recently. "I had never built a building in my life."

Miller had a play in mind, too; his impulse for the cabin was "to sit in the middle of it, and shut the door, and let things happen." All Miller knew about his new play was that it would be centered on a travelling salesman who would die at the end and that two of the lines were "Willy?" "It's all right. I came back"—words that to Miller spoke "the whole disaster in a nutshell." He says, "I mean, imagine a salesman who can't get past Yonkers. It's the end of the world. It's like an actor saying 'It's all right. I can't speak.' " As he worked away on his cabin, he repeated the play's two lines like a kind of mantra. "I kept saying, 'As soon as I get the roof on and the windows in, I'm gonna start this thing,' " he recalls. "And indeed I started on a morning in spring. Everything was starting to bud. Beautiful weather."

Miller had fashioned a desk out of an old door. As he sat down to it his tools and nails were still stashed in a corner of the studio, which was as yet unpainted and smelled of raw wood. "I started in the morning, went through the day, then had dinner, and then I went back there and worked till—I don't know—one or two o'clock in the morning," he says. "It sort of unveiled itself. I was the stenographer. I could hear them. I could hear them, literally." When Miller finally lay down to sleep that first night, he realized he'd been crying. "My eyes still burned and my throat was sore from talking it all out and shouting and laughing," he later wrote in his autobiography, "Timebends." In one day, he had produced, almost intact, the first act of "Death of a Salesman," which has since sold about eleven million copies, making it probably the most successful modern play ever published. The show, which is being put on somewhere in the world almost every day of the year, celebrates its fiftieth anniversary next month with a Broadway revival from Chicago's Goodman Theatre, directed by Robert Falls and starring Brian Dennehey as the fanatical and frazzled drummer Willy Loman.

"He didn't write 'Death of a Salesman'; he *released* it," the play's original director, Elia Kazan, said in his autobiography, "A Life." "It was there inside him, stored up waiting to be turned loose." To Miller, there was a "dream's quality in my memory of the writing and the day or two that followed its completion." In his notebook for "Death of a Salesman"—a sixty-six-page document chronicling the play's creation, which is kept with his papers at the University of Texas at Austin—he wrote, "He who understands everything about his subject cannot write it. I write as much to discover as to explain." After that first day of inspiration, it took Miller six weeks to call forth the second act and to make Willy remember enough "so he would kill himself." The form of the play—where past and present coalesce in a lyrical dramatic arc—was one that Miller felt he'd been



Miller wanted the audience to think, Oh, God, of course. Photographed at home in New York City by Helmut Newton.

"searching for since the beginning of my writing life." "Death of a Salesman" seems to spill out of Willy's panic-stricken, protean imagination, and not out of a playwright's detached viewpoint. "The play is written from the sidewalk instead of from a skyscraper," Miller says of its first-person urgency. But, ironically, it was from the deck of a skyscraper that Miller contemplated beginning his drama, in a kind of Shakespearean foreshadowing of Willy's suicidal delirium. The notebook's first entry reads:

> Scene 1—Atop Empire State. 2 guards. "Who will die today? It's that kind of day . . . fog, and poor visibility. They like to jump into a cloud. Who will it be today?"

As Miller navigated his way through the rush of characters and plot ideas, the notebook acted as ballast. "In every scene remember his size, ugliness," Miller reminds himself about Loman on its second page. "Remember his own attitude. Remember *pity.*" He analyzes his characters' motives. "Willy wants his sons to destroy his failure," he writes, and on a later page, "Willy resents Linda's unbroken, patient forgiveness (knowing there must be great hidden hatred for him in her heart)." In Miller's notebook, characters emerge sound and fully formed. For instance, of Willy's idealized elder son, Biff, who is a lost soul fallen from his high-school glory and full of hate for his father, he writes, "Biff is travelled, oppressed by guilt of failure, of not making money although a kind of indolence pleases him: an easygoing way of life. . . . Truthfully, Biff is not really bright enough to make a businessman. *Wants everything too* *fast.*" Miller also talks to himself about the emotional stakes and the trajectory of scenes:

> Have it happen that Willy's life is in Biff's hands—aside from Biff succeeding. There is Willy's guilt to Biff re: The Woman. But is that retrievable? There is Biff's disdain for Willy's character, his false aims, his pretense and these Biff cannot finally give up or alter. Discover the link between Biff's work views and his anti-work feelings.

Although the notebook begins with a series of choppy asides and outlines, it soon becomes an expansive, exact handwritten log of Miller's contact with his inner voices. For instance, it reveals the development of Charley, Loman's benevolent next-door neighbor, whose laconic evenhandedness was, in Miller's eyes, partly a projection of his own father. Charley speaks poignantly to Biff at Willy's graveside ("Nobody dast blame this man"); what appears in the last scene as a taut and memorable nine-line speech, a kind of eulogy, was mined from words (here indicated in italics) that were part of a much longer improvisation in the notebook:

> A salesman doesn't build anything, *he don't put a bolt to a nut* or a seed in the ground. A man who doesn't build anything must be liked. He must he cheerful on bad days. Even calamities mustn't break through. Cause one thing, he has got to be liked. *He don't tell you the law or give you medicine.* So there's no rock bottom to your life. All you know is that on good days or bad, you gotta come in cheerful. No calamity must be permitted to break through, Cause one thing, always, you're a man who's gotta be believed. You're way out there *riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smilin' back,* the sky falls in. *And then you get a couple of spots on your hat, and you're finished. Cause there's no rock bottom to your life.*

Here, as in all his notes for the play, Miller's passion and his flow are apparent in the surprising absence of cross-outs; the pages exude a startling alertness. He is listening not just to the voices of his characters but to the charmed country silence around him, which seems to define his creative state of grace:

> Roxbury—At night the insects softly thumping the screens like a blind man pushing with his fingers in the dark. . . . The crickets, frogs, whippoorwills altogether, a scream from the breast of the earth when everyone is gone. The evening sky, faded gray, like the sea pressing up against the windows, or an opaque gray screen. (Through which someone is looking in at me?)

On a bright-blue December afternoon last year, Miller, now eighty-three, returned to the cabin with his third wife, the photographer Inge Morath. Although she has lived with Miller for more than three decades, only one mile away from the "Salesman" studio, she had never seen the place. "The main house was occupied by people I didn't know. They were sort of engineer people. Very antipathetic," Miller said, swinging his red Volkswagen into the driveway of the new, friendly writer-owners. In a tan windbreaker and a baseball cap, he looked as rough-hewn and handy as any local farmer. (The dining-room tables and chairs in his current, cluttered 1782 farmhouse are Miller's handiwork, produced in his carpentry workshop.) After a cursory inspection of his old home, Miller, who is six feet three and stoops a little now, set off toward the cabin, up a steep hump that sits a few hundred paces from the back of the house. "In those days, I didn't think this hill was quite as steep," he said.

The cabin, a white clapboard construction in somewhat urgent need of a new coat of paint, stood just over the top of the rise, facing west, toward a thicket of birch trees and a field. "Oh, it will last as long as it's painted," Miller said, inspecting what he had wrought. "See, if a building has a sound roof, that's it, you'll keep it."

"I didn't know it was so tiny," Morath said. She snapped off a few photos, then waved her husband into the foreground for a picture before we all crowded into what proved to be a single high-ceilinged room. Except for a newly installed fluorescent light and some red linoleum that had been fitted over the floorboards, what Miller saw was what he'd built. He stepped outside to see if the cabin had been wired for electricity. (It had.) He inspected the three cinder blocks on which it was securely perched against the side of the hill. "I did the concrete," he recalled. Leaving, he turned to take a last look. "I learned a lot doing it," he said. "The big problem was getting the rafters of the roof up there alone. I finally built it on the ground and then swung them up." He added, "It's a bit like playwriting, you know. You get to a certain point, you gotta squeeze your way out of it."

Where does the alchemy of a great play begin? The seeds of "Death of a Salesman" were planted decades before Miller stepped into his cabin. "Selling was in the air through my boyhood," says Miller, whose father, Isidore, was the salesman-turned-owner of the Miltex Coat and Suit Company, which was a thriving enough business to provide the family with a spacious apartment on 110th Street in Harlem, a country bungalow, and a limousine and driver. "The whole idea of selling successfully was very important." Just as Miller was entering his teens, however, his father's business was wiped out by the Depression. Isidore's response was silence and sleep ("My father had trouble staying awake"); his son's response was anger. "I had never raised my voice against my father, nor did he against me, then or ever," wrote Miller, who had to postpone going to college for two years—until 1934—because "nobody was in possession of the fare." "As I knew perfectly well, it was not he who angered me, only his failure to cope with his fortune's collapse," Miller went on in his autobiography. "Thus I had two fathers, the real one and the metaphoric, and the latter I resented because he did not know how to win out over the general collapse."

"Death of a Salesman" is a lightning rod both for a father's bewilderment ("What's the secret?" Willy asks various characters) and for a son's fury at parental powerlessness ("You fake! You phoney little fake!" Biff tells Willy when they finally square off, in Act II). After the play's success, Miller's mother, Augusta, found an early manuscript called "In Memoriam," a forgotten autobiographical fragment that Miller had written when he was about seventeen. The piece, which was published in these pages in 1995, is about a Miltex salesman called Schoenzeit, who had once asked Miller for subway fare when Miller was helping him carry samples to an uptown buyer. The real Schoenzeit killed himself the next day by throwing himself in front of the El train; the character's "dejected soul"—a case of exhaustion masquerading as gaiety—is the first sighting of what would become Willy Loman. "His emotions were displayed at the wrong times always, and he knew when to laugh," Miller wrote. In 1952, Miller, rummaging through his papers, found a 1937 notebook in which he had made embryonic sketches of Willy, Biff, and Willy's second son, Happy. "It was the same family," he says of the twenty pages of realistic dialogue. "But I was unable in that straightforward, realistic form to contain what I thought of as the man's poetry—that is, the zigzag shots of his mind." He adds, "I just blotted it out."

Every masterpiece is a story of accident and accomplishment. Of all the historical and personal forces that fed the making of "Death of a Salesman," none was more important than a moment in 1947 when Miller's uncle Manny Newman accosted him in the lobby of the Colonial Theatre in Boston after a matinée of "All My Sons." "People regarded him as a kind of strange, completely untruthful personality," Miller says of Newman, a salesman and a notorious fabulist, who within the year would commit suicide. "I thought of him as a kind of wonderful inventor. There was something in him which was terribly moving, because his suffering was right on his skin, you see. He was the ultimate climber up the ladder who was constantly being stepped on by those climbing past him. My empathy for him was immense. I mean, how could he possibly have succeeded? There was no way." According to Miller, Newman was "cute and ugly, a bantam with a lisp. Very charming." He and his family, including two sons, Abby and Buddy, lived modestly in Brooklyn. "It was a house without irony, trembling with resolutions and shouts of victories that had not yet taken place but surely would tomorrow," Miller recalled in "Timebends." Newman was fiercely, wackily competitive; even when Miller was a child, in the few hours he spent in Newman's presence his uncle drew him into some kind of imaginary contest "which never stopped in his mind." Miller, who was somewhat ungainly as a boy, was often compared unfavorably with his cousins, and whenever he visited them, he said, "I always had to expect some kind of insin-

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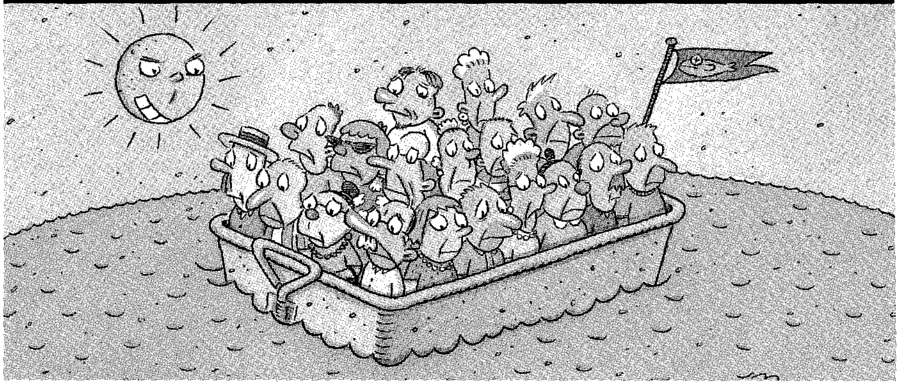

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uation of my entire life's probable failure."

When Newman approached Miller after that matinée, he had not seen his nephew for more than a decade. He had tears in his eyes, but, instead of complimenting the playwright, he told Miller, "Buddy is doing very well." Miller says now, "He had simply picked up the conversation from fifteen years before. That element of competitiveness—his son competing with me—was so alive in his head that there was no gate to keep it from his mouth. He was living in two places at the same time." Miller continues, "So everything is in the present. For him to say 'Buddy is doing very well'—there are no boundaries. It's all now. It's all now. And that to me was wonderful."

At the time, Miller was absorbed in the tryout of "All My Sons" and had "not the slightest interest in writing about a salesman." Until "All My Sons," Miller's plays had not been naturalistic in style; he had "resolved to write a play that could be put on," and had "put two years into 'All My Sons' to be sure that I believed every page of it." But Miller found naturalism, with its chronological exposition, "not sensuous enough" as a style; he began to imagine a kind of play where, as in Greek drama, issues were confronted head on, and where the transitions between scenes were pointed rather than disguised. The success of "All My Sons" emboldened him. "I could now move into unknown territory," Miller says. "And that unknown territory was basically that we're thinking on several planes at the same time. I wanted to find a way to try to make everything happen at once." In his introduction to the fiftieth-anniversary edition of "Death of a Salesman," Miller writes, "The play had to move forward not by following a narrow discreet line, but as a phalanx." He continues, "There was no model I could adapt for this play, no past history for the kind of work I felt it could become." The notebook for the play shows Miller formulating a philosophy for the kind of Cubist stage pictures that would become his new style:

> Life is formless—its interconnections are cancelled by lapses of time, by events occurring in separate places, by the hiatus of memory. We live in the world made by man and the past. Art suggests or makes the interconnection palpable. Form is the tension of these interconnections: man with man, man with the past and present environment. The drama at its best is a mass experience of this tension.

At first, the Manny Newman encounter inspired in Miller only the intimation of a new, slashing sense of dramatic form. The play's structure is embedded in the structure of Loman's turbulent mind, which, Miller says, destroys the boundaries between then and now. As a result, "there are no flashbacks, strictly speaking, in 'Death of a Salesman,'" he says. "It's always moving forward." In this way, Miller jettisoned what he calls "the daylight continuity" of naturalism for the more fluid dark logic of dreams. "In a dream you don't have transitional material," Miller says. "The dream starts where it starts to mean something." He continues, "I wanted to start every scene at the last possible instant, no matter where that instant happened to be." He picked up a copy of his play and read me its first beats: " 'Willy?' 'It's all right. I came back.' 'Why? What happened? Did something happen, Willy?' 'No, nothing happened.' " He added, "We're into the thing in three lines." His new structure jump-started both the scenes and the stage language, whose intensity Miller called "emergency speech"—an "unashamedly open" idiom that replaced "the crabbed dramatic hints and pretexts of the natural." Willy dies without a secret; the play's structure, with its crosscutting between heightened moments, encouraged the idea of revelation. The audience response that Miller wanted to incite, he said, "was not 'What happens next and why?' so much as 'Oh, God, of course.' "

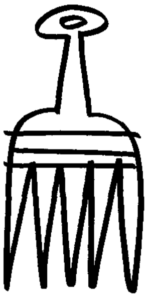
When, early in 1948, Miller visited his cousin Abby Newman to talk about the blighted life of his late father, Miller himself had just such an epiphany. Newman told Miller, "He wanted a business for us. So we could all work together. A business for the boys." Miller, who repeated Newman's words in the play, wrote in his autobiography, "This conventional, mundane wish was a shot of electricity that switched all the random iron filings in my mind in one direction. A hopelessly distracted Manny was transformed into a man with a purpose: he had been trying to make a gift that would crown all those striving years; all those lies he told, all his imaginings and crazy exaggerations, even the almost military discipline he had laid on his boys, were in this instant given form and point. I suddenly understood him with my very blood."

Victoria Roberts

"Camouflage becomes you."

WILLY LOMAN is a salesman, but we're never told what product he lugs around in his two large sample cases. Once, a theatregoer buttonholed

Miller and put the question to him: "What's he selling? You never say what he's selling." Miller quipped, "Well, himself. That's who's in the valise." Miller adds, "You sell yourself. You sell the goods. You become the commodity." Willy's house echoes with exhortations to his two floundering sons about the presentation of self ("The man who creates personal interest is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want") and the imperialism of self ("Lick the world. You guys together could absolutely lick the civilized world"). In his notebook Miller writes, "Willy longs to take off, be great," and "Willy wants his boys prepared for any life. 'Nobody will laugh at them—take advantage. They'll be big men.' It's the big men who command respect." In Willy's frenzied and exhausted attempt to claim himself, Miller had stumbled onto a metaphor for a postwar society's eagerness to pursue its self-interest after years of postponed life. In Willy's desperate appetite for success and in the brutal dicta offered by his rich brother Ben ("Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way") "Death of a Salesman" caught the spirit of self-aggrandizement being fed by what Miller calls "the biggest boom in the history of the world." Americans had struggled through the Depression, then fought a world war to keep the nation's democratic dream alive; that dream was, broadly speaking, a dream of self-realization. America, with its ideal of freedom, challenged its citizens to see how far they could go in a lifetime—"to end up big," as Willy says. (In the play, Ben, whom Willy looks to for answers—the notebook points to him as "the visible evidence of what the boys can do and be. Superior family"—is literally the predatory imperialist who at seventeen walked into the African jungle and emerged four years later as a millionaire.) Miller was not the first to dramatize the barbarity of American individualism; but, in a shift that signalled the changing cultural mood, he was the first to stage this spiritual battle of attrition as a journey to the interior of the American psyche. "In a certain sense, Willy is all the voices," Miller said later. In fact, "The Inside of His Head" was Miller's first title for the play; he also briefly toyed with the idea of having the proscenium designed in the shape of a head and having the action take place inside it.



In the economic upheavals of the thirties, social realism reflected the country's mood; plays held a mirror up to the external world, not an internal one. But in the postwar boom Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie" (1945) and "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1947), written in what Williams called his "personal lyricism," suddenly found an audience and struck a deep new chord in American life. The plays were subjective, poetic, symbolic; they made a myth of the self, not of social remedies. Indeed, the name "Willy Loman" was not intended by Miller as a sort of socioeconomic indicator ("low man"). Miller took it from a chilling moment in Fritz Lang's film "The Testament of Dr. Mabuse" (1933) when, after a long and terrifying stakeout, a disgraced detective who thinks he can redeem himself by exposing a gang of forgers is pursued and duped by them. The chase ends with the detective on the phone to his former boss ("Lohmann? Help me, for God's sake! Lohmann!"); when we see him next, he is in an asylum, gowned and frightened and shouting into an invisible phone ("Lohmann? Lohmann? Lohmann?"). "What the name really meant to me was a terrified man calling into the void for help that will never come," Miller said.

Willy Loman's particular terror goes to the core of American individualism, in which the reputable self and the issue of wealth are hopelessly tangled. "A man can't go out the way he came in," Willy says to Ben. "A man has got to add up to something." Willy, who, at sixty, has no job, no money, no loyalty from his boys, is sensationally lacking in assets and in their social corollary—a sense of blessing. "He envies those who are blessed; he feels unblessed, but he's striving for it," Miller says. Although Willy's wife, Linda, famously says of him that "attention must be paid," he feels invisible to the world. "I'm not noticed," he says. Later, Linda confides to the boys, "For five weeks he's been on straight commission, like a beginner, an unknown!" As Miller puts it now, "The whole idea of people failing with us is

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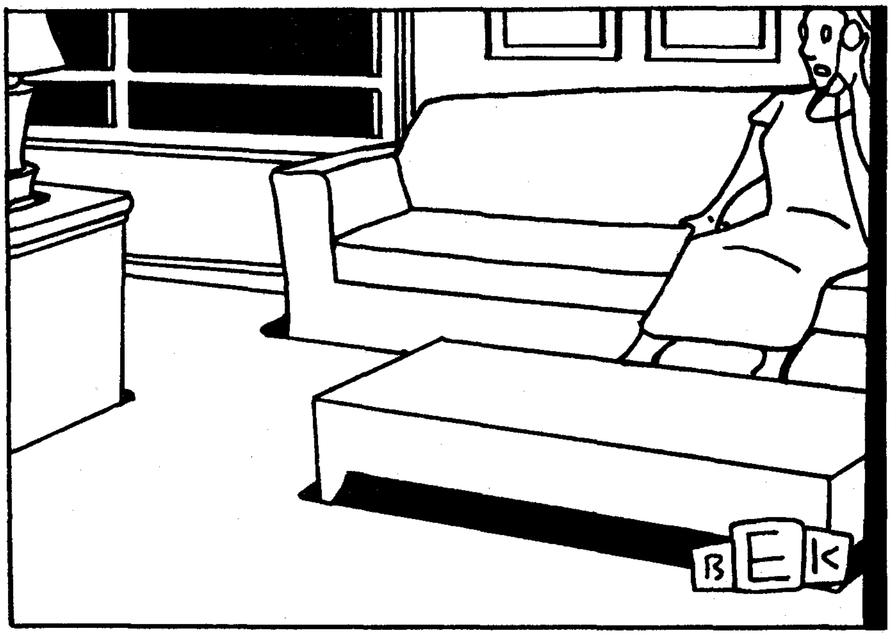

"No, no, no—stay as late as you want. In fact, divorce me."

that they can no longer be loved. You haven't created a persona which people will pay for, see, experience, or come close to. It's almost like death. You have a deathly touch. People who succeed are loved because they exude some magical formula for fending off destruction, fending off death." He continues, "It's the most brutal way of looking at life that one can imagine, because it discards anyone who does not measure up. It wants to destroy them. It's been going on since the Puritan times. You are beyond the blessing of God. You're beyond the reach of God. That God rewards those who deserve it. It's a moral condemnation that goes on. You don't want to be near this failure."

"Death of a Salesman" was the first play to dramatize this punishing—and particularly American—interplay of panic and achievement. Before "Salesman," Eugene O'Neill's "The Iceman Cometh" (1946) raised the issue in the eerie calm of Harry Hope's bar, whose sodden habitués have retreated from competitiveness into a perverse contentment; as one of the characters says, "No one here has to worry about where they're going next, because there is no farther they can go." But in Willy Loman, Miller was able to bring both the desperation and the aspiration of American life together in one character.

Willy is afflicted by the notion of winning—what Brecht called "the black addiction of the brain." He cheats at cards; he encourages his boys to seek every advantage. Victory haunts him and his feckless sons. In a scene from the notebook, Biff and Happy tell Willy of their plan to go into business. "Step on it, boys, there ain't a minute to lose," Willy tells them, but their souls are strangled by their father's heroic dreams, which hang over them like some sort of spiritual kudzu. In another notebook entry, Biff rounds fiercely on Willy: "I don't care if you live or die. You think I'm mad at you because of the Woman, don't you? I am, but I'm madder because you botched up my life, because I can't tear you out of my heart, because I keep trying to make good, be something for you, to succeed for you."

In dramatizing the fantasy of competition, Miller's play was the first to dissect cultural envy in action—that process of invidious comparison which drives society forward but also drives it crazy. "You lose your life to it!" Miller says of the envy that feeds Willy's restlessness. "It's the ultimate outer-directional emotion. In other words, I am doing this not because it's flowing from me but because it's flowing against him." He goes on, "You're living in a mirror. It's a life of reflections. Emptiness. Emptiness. Emptiness. Hard to go to sleep at night. And hard to wake up." In his mind, Willy is competing with his brother Ben; with Dave Singleman, a successful old salesman who could make a living "without ever leaving his room" and who died a placid, accomplished death on a train to Boston; with his neighbor Charley, who owns his own business; and with Charley's successful lawyer son, Bernard. "Where's Willy in all this?" Miller asks. "He's competed himself to death. He's not existing anymore, or hardly."

In his notebook Miller wrote, "It is the combination of guilt (of failure), hate, and love—all in conflict that he resolves by 'accomplishing' a 20,000 dollar death." In death, Willy is worth more than in life. His suicide is the ultimate expression of his confusion of success with love and also of his belief in winning at all costs. As a father, he overlooked Biff's small childhood acts of larceny—taking sand from a building site, stealing basketballs, getting the answers for tests from the nerdy, studious Bernard—and Biff has continued his habit into adulthood, out of a combination of envy and revenge. A notebook citation reads, "It is necessary to (1) reveal to Willy that Biff stole to queer himself, and did it to hurt Willy," and "(2) And that he did it because of the Woman and all the disillusionment it implied." In the final version of the play, Biff, admitting in passing that he spent three months in a Kansas City jail for lifting a suit, tells Willy, "I stole myself out of every good job since high school!" At first, Miller saw the twenty thousand dollars of insurance money as cash to put Biff on the straight and narrow. "'My boy's a thief—with 20,000 he'd stop it,'" he wrote in the notebook. Instead, Willy's suicide—the final show of force and fraud, in keeping with his demented competitive fantasies—is pitched on a more grandiose and perverse note. In an early draft of the terrific penultimate scene, where Biff exposes Willy and calls it quits with him and his dream, there is this exchange:

> BIFF (*to him*): What the hell do you want from me? What do you want from me?
> WILLY: —Greatness—
> BIFF: No—

In Miller's final draft, Willy, who will not accept his son's confession of thievery, takes Biff's greatness as a given as he visualizes his own suicide. "Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?" he says to Ben. He adds, "Imagine? When the mail comes he'll be ahead of Bernard again." When he goes to his death, Willy, in his mind, is on a football field with Biff, and full of vindictive triumph ("When you hit, hit low and hit hard, because it's important, boy"). "He dies sending his son through the goalposts," Miller says. "He dies moving." Miller pauses. "I think now that Kazan had it right from the beginning. He said, 'It's a love story.' "

On the last page of his notebook, Miller scribbled a short speech to give to the original cast after its members had read the play in galleys: "I want you all to know now that the cannons are quiet that this production has been the most gratifying I have known. I believe you are the finest ever gathered for any play and I am exceedingly proud and gratified not only for myself but for the American theatre." (The original cast included Lee J. Cobb as Willy, with Mildred Dunnock, Arthur Kennedy, and Cameron Mitchell.) In its passage to greatness, "Death of a Salesman" was enhanced enormously by the poetic set design of Jo Mielziner, who created a series of platforms, with Willy's house as a haunting omnipresent background. However, as Elia Kazan pointed out in his autobiography, "The stage direction in the original manuscript that Art gave me to read directly after he'd finished it does not mention a home as a scenic element. It reads, 'A pinpoint travelling spot lights a small area on stage left. The Salesman is revealed. He takes out his keys and opens an invisible door.' " Kazan continues, "It was a play waiting for a directorial solution." It got it. "Death of a Salesman" also got its share of bad suggestions. Kazan's then wife, Molly Day Thacher, who was a playreader for the Group Theatre and had some influence over Kazan, tried to get Miller, as he remembers it, "to cut out Uncle Ben, all the memory scenes, and simply make it a realistic little narrative." And the coproducer, Kermit Bloomgarden, nervous of a play with "Death" in its title, took a poll among theatregoers which asked, "Would you go to see a play called 'Death of a Salesman'?" Nobody would. "They had a list of about fifteen titles," Miller says. "One was 'Free and Clear.' I'll never forget that."

In the intervening half century, the surface of American life has changed, but its mad competitiveness hasn't. "I'm not aware of any change in the way people look at this play," Miller says, but he admits that Willy's complaints about loyalty from the head office ring strange to contemporary ears. "Workers now—not just workers but management—know that nobody will have much pity for them." Last year, in a poll taken by the Royal National Theatre of eight hundred English theatre professionals, Miller was voted the greatest contemporary playwright; but in America, where in some quarters he's seen as a kind of Jeremiah, Miller is not accorded quite the same honor. He ascribes his decline in popularity to the erosion of the "unified audience" that came with the rise of the avant-garde in the early sixties. "The only theatre available to a playwright in the late forties was Broadway," Miller writes in the fiftieth-anniversary edition of "Salesman." "That theatre had one single audience . . . catering to very different levels of age, culture, education, and intellectual sophistication." He continues, "One result of this mix was the ideal, if not frequent fulfillment, of a kind of play that would be complete rather than fragmentary, an emotional rather than an intellectual experience, a play basically of heart with its ulterior moral gesture integrated with action rather than rhetoric. In fact, it was a Shakespearean ideal, a theatre for anyone with an understanding of English and perhaps some common sense."

But there was nothing Shakespearean in the response to "that damned disturbing play," as Kazan called it, on the night of its début, February 10, 1949, in Philadelphia. "The curtain came down and nothing happened," Miller says. "People sat there a good two or three minutes, then somebody stood up with his coat. Several men—I didn't see women doing this—were helpless. They were sitting there with handkerchiefs over their faces. It was like a funeral." He continues, "I didn't know whether the show was dead or alive. The cast was back there wondering what had happened. Nobody'd pulled the curtain up. Finally, someone thought to applaud, and then the house came apart." ♦

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE INVISIBLE WAR

In remote terrain, two million Sudanese have died. Others are being enslaved. The fighting has lasted for decades, and no one is trying to end it.

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

“THEY are raiders.” That was the first description I heard of the armed Toposa tribesmen standing in the thorn scrub, silently watching our truck pass. “They come to raid goats and cattle from the Turkana,” said Samuel Siwiyu. “If they are unsuccessful, then they want to hijack us.” The raiders—two ragged, barefoot figures with greased long hair and with Kalashnikovs on their backs—did not move as we slowly ground past them.

I had caught a ride earlier that morning from northern Kenya—where the semi-nomadic Turkana live—into southern Sudan with two downcountry Kenyans, Siwiyu and Peter Walmalwa. They were modern guys, working for a freight firm that hauls food for international relief groups into Sudan. Walmalwa, thirty-nine and muscular, was the driver; Siwiyu, twenty-three, was his “turn boy,” or assistant. Today they were carrying sorghum for Catholic Relief Services to a village called New Cush, in the Didinga Hills. I'd been interested in seeing New Cush, because I had heard that it was an odd place. Now, though, I was suddenly interested in the Toposa, the gun-toting nomads whose arid, impressively deserted country we were driving through. We saw one or two of them every few miles, and my companions' descriptions were casually contradictory.

“They are warriors.”

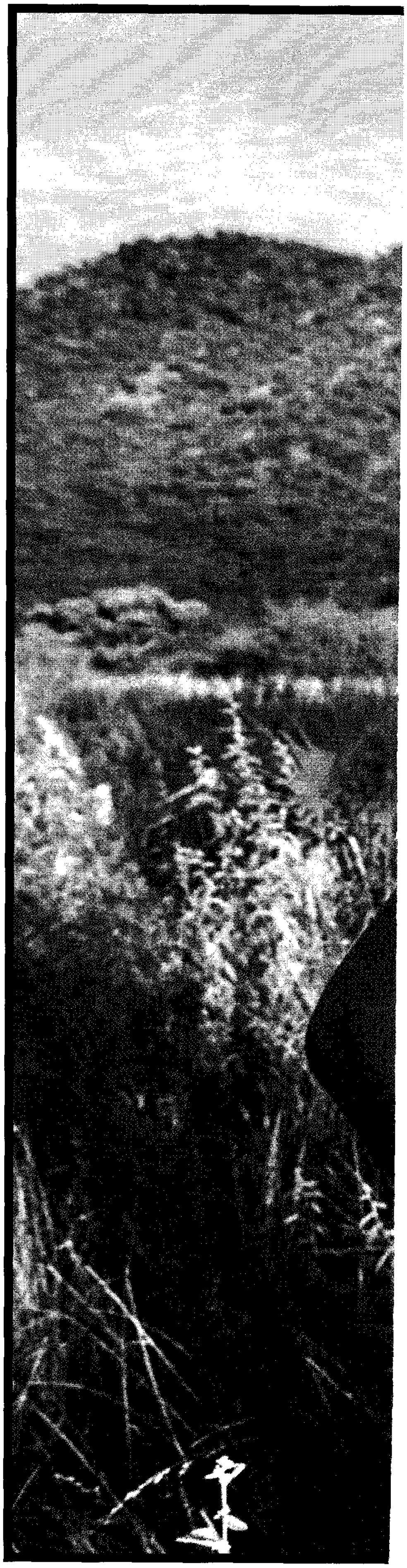
“They are collaborators with the Arabs.”

“They are hunters.”

These were all educated guesses, each perhaps partly true, but together they managed to suggest, I thought, the endlessly unstable quality of identity—cultural, political, military—in southern Sudan. “The Arabs” meant the Sudanese government, whose capital was in faraway Khartoum. Since Sudan gained its independence, in 1956, “the Arabs”—that is, a long series of Muslim-led governments, civilian and military, elected and otherwise—have been fighting a civil war against non-Muslim black rebels in the South. (The only significant break in the fighting lasted from 1972 to 1983.) At present, the government controls little territory in the southern third of the country—mainly just a string of garrison towns—and the rebels of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army largely hold sway there. But my Kenyan exegetes were right: Khartoum had armed some of the Toposa and encouraged them to attack anybody sympathetic to the S.P.L.A. There are said to be six hundred ethnic groups in Sudan, speaking some four hundred languages, and it suits the government to have a maximum number of armed bands roaming around, raiding their neighbors and generally preventing the South from forming a united front against the North.

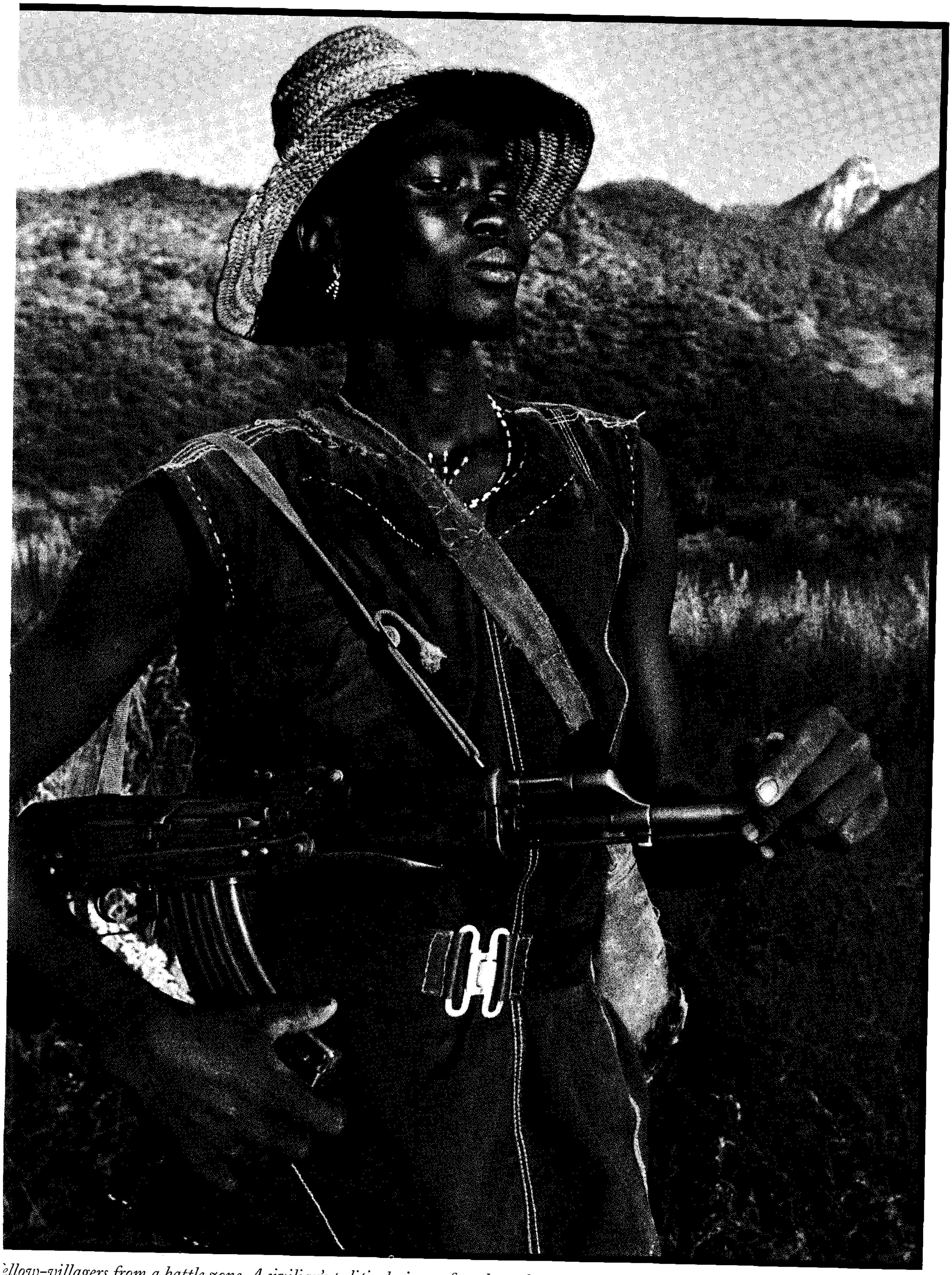
Obscure, chaotic, and low-tech as it is, the civil war in Sudan is a disaster of historic proportions. Altogether, it has killed more than two million people, according to the latest figures—by some estimates, more than any other conflict since the Second World War. The great majority of the dead have been civilians in the South. Partly because southern Sudan is one of the world's poorest, least accessible regions, news coverage of the war has been light. I recently made four trips into the South, hitching lifts from a different group each time, and I usually felt as if I were just catching glimpses, from behind thick glass, of an immense panorama of struggle and suffering which defied neat interpretation. Certainly this truck ride to New Cush was like that.

We had been travelling since we crossed the border with an S.P.L.A. “escort”: a single soldier, riding on top of the truck's cab. Seen from up close, the sol-



A Lopit farmer and sentry who escorted h

SABA



ellow-villagers from a battle zone. A civilian's political views often depend on who's asking and why. Photograph by Cedric Galbe.

dier wasn't much—a scrawny kid with the facial scars (horizontal lines on his forehead) of a Nuer tribesman, fifteen years old at the most, dressed in rags. But he kept his assault rifle on display and seemed to have the desired deterrent effect on the Toposa gunmen.

Some basic things shift when you enter southern Sudan. Back at the border, for instance, I had seen a crowd standing around a rough hut. The people wore rags, and I assumed that they were displaced peasants, fleeing the war or recent floods on the Nile or perhaps the famine in Bahr al-Ghazal, hundreds of miles to the northwest. Siwiyu had chuckled at my speculations. "No, they are businesspeople," he said. The privations of life in southern Sudan can make even businesspeople look like homeless waifs.

An antelope darted off the road. Shrikes with big, cruel-looking beaks perched in the infrequent trees. Then our young military escort lowered his head into the cab and informed me that I would be arrested at Natinga, the next village. I hoped I had misunderstood him. I asked him to repeat his announcement. He explained, in mangled but unambiguous English, that the papers I had shown at the border—which I had obtained from an S.P.L.A. office in Nairobi, and which gave me, I thought, permission to travel in "New Sudan"—were in fact not in order. So I would be arrested when we reached Natinga. He returned to his perch on the roof.

S.P.L.A. jails are notorious, even in southern Sudan, for their discomfort. Many are just pits in the ground. I had used my permit from Nairobi to travel in other parts of S.P.L.A.-controlled New Sudan. Why was it suddenly not in order?

At Natinga, we crawled up a rough track between rows of thatched huts, past staring, phlegmatic villagers. This, I noted listlessly, was no longer Toposa country. These people were Didinga—farmers as well as herders. Apparently not hijackers. Boulder-covered hills rose around us. Finally, we came to an S.P.L.A. roadblock. Our escort climbed off the truck and began to confer with the soldiers at the roadblock. People turned and studied me, the *khawadja* smiling strangely in the cab. Voices rose. Then, to my astonishment, our escort was abruptly cuffed across the side of the head by a bigger, older soldier and was roughly relieved of his rifle. My companions, the Kenyans, laughed. Eventually, the log blocking our way was moved and we proceeded into the hills—with our young escort back on the roof, although now he had no gun. Nobody had even spoken to me.

I asked Walmalwa and Siwiyu what had happened at Natinga. "That boy deserted twice already," Siwiyu said. "When the Arabs drop their bombs, he runs away. He goes to Kenya and sells his gun. Each time, they catch him. Now he cannot be trusted with a weapon."

The road became ridiculous. Our truck, which had many extra-low gears and extra-high clearance, was a monster—German-built for NATO use, Walmalwa said—but even it struggled on the steep, rocky track. Walmalwa grappled expertly with the wheel, his bare chest streaming with sweat. The landscape, meanwhile, got steadily more verdant. Pale butterflies swarmed in the creek beds. Acacias sprouted dark bushy leaves, and red-dirt anthills grew so tall that they looked at first glance like giraffes grazing on the treetops. But except for a lone troop of baboons scampering along a ridge we saw no wild animals in the Didinga Hills. Most of the big game that roamed southern Sudan a generation ago has vanished—another casualty of the wartime glut of automatic weapons. Siwiyu cheerfully pointed out the corpses of trucks rusting in the ravines. Those were vehicles that had been captured from the Arabs, he said. The S.P.L.A. had trouble getting spare parts, so the rebels just used the vehicles until they crashed or died.

New Cush was only twelve miles from Natinga, but the drive took us three hours. We descended from the hills, grinding through a haze of dust and early-afternoon heat, the violet mountains of northern Uganda now visible to the south. We had not met a single oncoming vehicle all day.

New Cush is indeed an odd place. It's a new village, established in 1994 by the S.P.L.A. with the help of international relief organizations, and the odd thing about it is that it has no tribal identity. Nearly nine thousand people, from all over southern Sudan, live there. Most are peasants displaced by the war; many are the families of S.P.L.A. fighters. Though the land is well watered and fertile, the area had been uninhabited five years before. "It was a no man's land," Philip Chol Biowei explained. Mr. Biowei is the area secretary of the S.P.L.A.'s humanitarian wing. An older man, well spoken, sad-looking, he was sitting at an empty desk in a dusty office. "The Toposa, the Turkana, the Didinga, the Dodoth from Uganda—they all fought over this place. It was nobody's homeland, it was never secure. But since we came there have been no incidents."

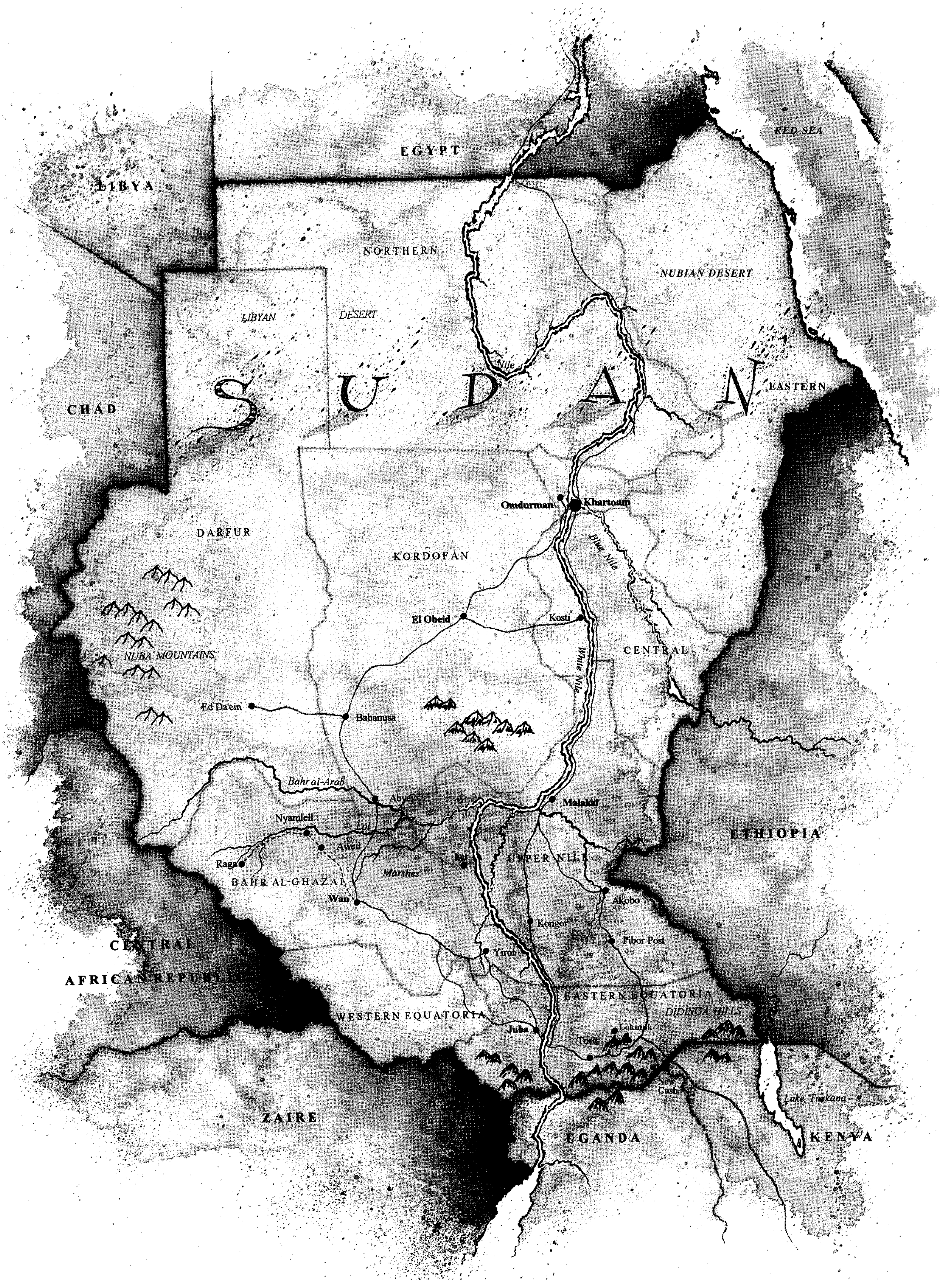
The S.P.L.A., from its founding, in 1983, has had to contend with the idea, common among other Sudanese, that it is primarily a Dinka movement. The Dinka, whose homeland includes some of the vast White Nile swampland known as the Sudd, are the largest ethnic group in the South. Colonel John Garang, the S.P.L.A.'s leader, is Dinka. So, for that matter, is Philip Chol Biowei. Indeed, the two men come from the same Dinka tribe—and there are, by one common classification, sixty-five Dinka-speaking tribes. A social experiment such as New Cush, in which members of many ethnic groups live together peacefully, under S.P.L.A. auspices, is therefore important symbolically, if nothing else, to the rebel cause.

As in many places in southern Sudan, serious food shortages were being avoided—according to a rather worldly schoolteacher I met there—only by a steady stream of international aid. Food production and local welfare systems have been disrupted everywhere by the war. The United Nations' World Food Program reported in August that it was feeding more than a million and a half people in rebel-held zones alone.

The teacher, who spoke good English, asked to see a copy of the magazine I worked for. I happened to have one in my bag. He took it eagerly, but then seemed to be stopped cold by an automobile ad on the back cover. He studied it for several minutes. I thought I saw what mesmerized him. The sheer weight of material wealth conveyed by every detail of the ad stunned even me, as I squatted there in the shade beside a hut in New Cush.

While shirtless men heaved the bags of sorghum off our truck, I started chatting with our no longer armed military escort. His name, he said, was Simon Ater. He turned out to be a sweet kid. I asked how he had got a terrible, apple-size scar on one side of his face. He mumbled that his father had hit him. I

MIKE REAGAN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DARFUR
KORDOFAN
Blue Nile
El Obeid
Kosti
NUBA MOUNTAINS
CENTRAL
White Nile
Ed Da'ein
Babanusa
Bahr al-Arab
Abyei
Malakal
ETHIOPIA
Nyamlell
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UPPER NILE
BAHR AL-GHAZAL
Marshes
Wau
Akobo
Kongor
Pibor Post
Yirol
CENTRAL
AFRICAN REPUBLIC
EASTERN EQUATORIA
DIDINGA HILLS
WESTERN EQUATORIA
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Lokutok
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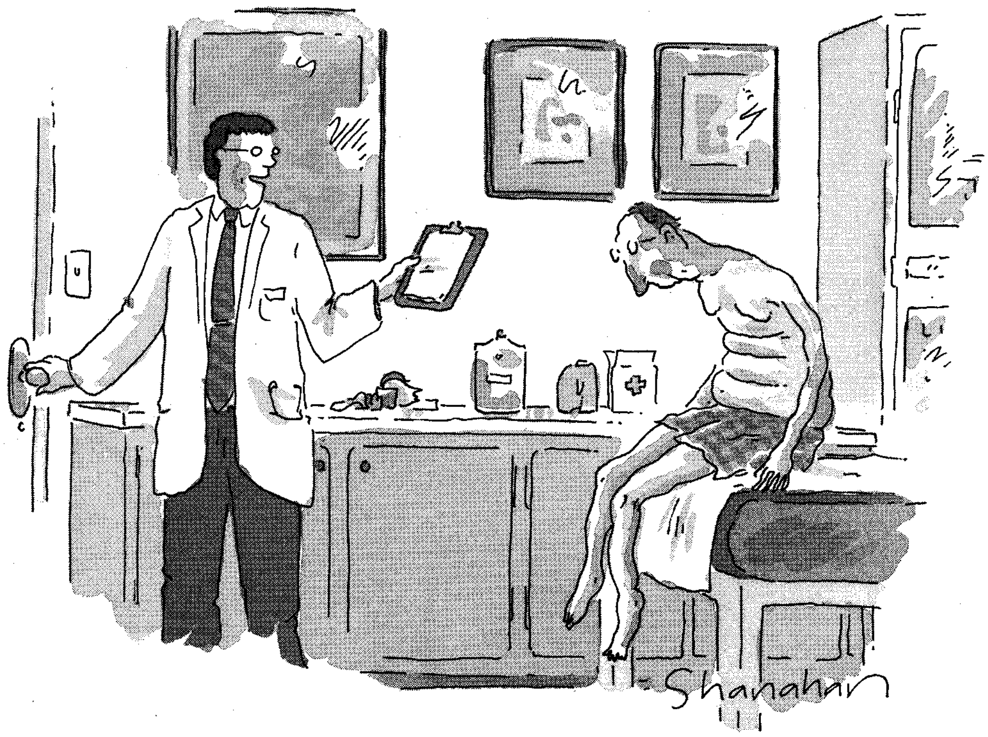
KENYA

Sudan's borders seem to have been perversely drawn to seal in ethnic and historical enmity and insure a future of civil war.



"Good news, Mr. Pickett—it's just a slow leak."

• •

guessed that the scar might actually be from a punishment for his desertions. It might also have been that Simon called one of his commanders his father. When I asked how old he was, Simon shyly admitted he had no idea.

We headed back to Natinga with several dozen paying passengers now riding in the cleared truck bed. (Most of southern Sudan has no cash economy, but Kenyan shillings occasionally circulate in the southernmost part of the country.) Miscellaneous cargo—goats, firewood, sacks of grain—began to find its way aboard, and our progress, never swift, was further slowed by much multilingual haggling between Walmalwa, who was now running a brisk transport business, and the Sudanese who wanted to make use of his truck.

The S.P.L.A. checkpoints became increasingly complicated propositions, too, as the soldiers insisted on digging through passengers' bags, in search of weapons or ammunition being smuggled to Kenya. Walmalwa, who had already been driving for more than twelve hours, started to lose his sense of humor. He showed the soldiers less respect than they were accustomed to—brusquely demanding, for instance, that they speak intelligible English, as a Kenyan would. This went over badly, particularly with those soldiers who had started drinking sorghum beer much earlier in the day—it was now dusk. Walmalwa's defiance led to a couple of frightening scenes, during which we were all ordered off the truck with a great deal of shouting and waving of guns. "I refuse to be terrorized," Walmalwa calmly remarked to me, and he told the soldiers, "You do your job, I do mine."

One officer became hysterical, sticking the barrel of his rifle in Walmalwa's face and screaming repeatedly, in English, "I am not a traitor!" This seemed a strange claim under the circumstances. Maybe, I thought, he was actually shouting "I am not a trader!" and was objecting to our unlicensed commerce. In any event, to my amazement, an old Didinga woman who was riding with us intervened: she fiercely rebuked the S.P.L.A. officer with a spitting tirade in Didinga until he, perhaps equally amazed, backed down, and we were allowed to proceed.

We were now travelling with a serious S.P.L.A. escort of half a dozen well-armed men. We were also travelling in convoy with another truck, which we had overtaken; it was a sister vehicle, from the same Kenyan freight firm. Somewhere in Toposa country, the other truck broke down. I voted to take its crew with us and leave the truck there, but I was ignored. And so we sat, several dozen of us, on the dusty roadside in the moonlight while the Kenyans worked on a dribbling fuel pump by a faltering flashlight. I was hungry—I had eaten nothing all day but a packet of biscuits—and found that I, too, was losing my sense of humor when a lanky figure in civilian clothes introduced himself as an S.P.L.A. officer and asked, insinuatingly, if I happened to work for the C.I.A. or the Mossad. The soldiers in our escort had fanned out around the trucks, forming a professional-looking perimeter. They seemed to be taking seriously the threat of Toposa bandits (or hunters, or warriors, or collaborators). I wanted to suggest that my interrogator make himself useful and join them, but instead I made some mild remark and sidled away into the gloom.

Simon Ater sidled with me. He now seemed concerned about my welfare, advising me to stay clear of the insinuating officer, and I did so. Then, when we got back on the road, with the fuel pump repaired, and, around midnight, finally reached the border with Kenya, Simon did me (and the Kenyan truckers) a great favor. The border officials bluntly forbade us to pass. They said that the road was closed for the night. But Simon, who was stationed nearby and knew the officials, remonstrated with them until they let us go.

On the Kenyan side of the border, the road, though still a dirt track, was far better maintained than anything we had seen in Sudan. I found myself marvelling at every sign of basic grading and filling. We crossed a dry riverbed where a tin culvert was being installed by, according to a battered sign, the Ministry of Public Works. This idea—a ministry of public works!—was strangely thrilling. I kept thinking about Simon Ater. When I'd asked him how I could show my gratitude for his help at the border, he'd said I could bring him a pair of rubber sandals the next time I came this way.

SUDAN is not the only country in Africa whose borders seem to have been perversely drawn, sealing enough ethnic and historical enmity within them to insure a future of civil war. It is, however, the largest country in Africa, covering more than a million square miles, and the fact that it stretches from the Nubian and Libyan Deserts, where it shares borders with Egypt and Libya, to the rain forests of central Africa, where it borders on Congo and Uganda, has helped condemn its people to unusually harsh and intractable strife since independence.

Before this century, the main basis of the relationship between the Muslim North and the non-Muslim South of today's Sudan was, moreover, a busy slave trade: some two million southerners are thought to have been taken north as slaves during the nineteenth century alone. This profoundly bitter connection might even be described as the underlying reason that the two regions find themselves in the same modern nation. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire, responding to British pressure and employing British administrators, tried to stamp out the slave trade in the Sudan, provoking, in 1881, a rebellion among the local Muslims, who also objected to the corruption of Ottoman rule. These rebels were the Mahdists, who took Khartoum, beheading General Charles Gordon in 1885. Mahdist rule, at its peak, apparently extended up the White Nile as far south as the present-day border with Uganda, and included all of Dinka country. After the British reconquered the region, in 1898, the colonial boundaries hardened largely where centuries of slavers had established them.

The British administration, to be sure, treated northern and southern Sudan as if they were separate countries. Infrastructure development was directed almost exclusively to the North, while the South was administered under a closed-door policy that included expulsion of Arab traders and discouragement of the spread of Islam. Christian missionaries were allowed to work in the South, and graduates of the mission schools tended to go farther south, to Kenya and Uganda—rather than to Khartoum—for college. The future of southern Sudan was seen, both by the British and by the emerging mission-educated southern élite, to lie with black East Africa rather than with the Arab North. Things did not turn out that way, mainly because of the great determination of northern nationalists to take the South with them when they charted their course for independence. The northern leadership failed almost entirely to consult with the southern leadership about the terms of independence, and the first round of civil war started four months before the Union Jack was even lowered.

That round of warfare lasted seventeen years and took half a million lives. It finally ended, in 1972, with an agreement that gave the South a large degree of self-government and control over its natural resources, which were soon discovered to include oil. In 1983, Khartoum tore up the agreement. General Ja'far Nimeiri, an erratic leader who had come to power in a 1969 military coup, stripped the southern legislature of its powers and decreed that the southern oil would be refined in a northern city. What was more, Nimeiri, who had become a fanatic Muslim, ordered that Islamic shariah law be applied throughout the country, which meant that even non-Muslims would be subjected to the often ghastly punishments of *hudud* (which include amputation of limbs and stoning to death) for such crimes as adultery and drinking alcohol. By then, southern soldiers had mutinied, and the S.P.L.A. was launched.

Nearly two million southerners have died in the current round of the civil war, either directly from the fighting or from war-related famine and disease. Four million others have been driven from their homes—some into neighboring countries, many into the North. Although there are no reliable figures—Sudan's population is estimated to be around thirty million, but the country's last accurate census took place in 1956—the South's population has probably declined since 1983, when it was believed to be around five million.

MANY observers have used the word "genocide" to describe Khartoum's conduct of the war. The government's destruction of villages, targeting of civilians, and obstruction of international relief supplies to desperate (sometimes starving) populations in the South have been widely documented. Perhaps the strongest case for a charge of genocide, however, exists in the Nuba Mountains, which until recently were the only theatre of the war not in the South. The Nuba people are a congeries of black African tribes who inhabit a fertile range of hills in central Sudan, surrounded by plains-dwelling Arabs. The S.P.L.A. opened a front in the area in 1986, and the government's response has been notably brutal: of an estimated total of a million Nuba, more than half have been displaced, and more than a hundred thousand are believed to have perished.

Living conditions in the South, al-

"After all these years together, the mating is still reasonably good."

ways difficult, have deteriorated drastically. Very few people now have access to clean water, and diseases—cholera, malaria, hepatitis, measles, kala-azar, leprosy, sleeping sickness—kill many thousands each year. Few schools, few hospitals, and few roads remain open. Land mines are ubiquitous. Famine, a constant threat in subsistence economies during wartime, strikes quickly when crops fail or must be abandoned or when people's cattle or goats are stolen. In 1988, a devastating famine following a drought killed a quarter of a million people, and in 1989 an international relief consortium called Operation Lifeline Sudan was established to deal with the country's seemingly permanent humanitarian emergency. O.L.S., which today consists of two U.N. agencies (UNICEF and the World Food Program) and forty nongovernmental organizations, operates on both sides of the civil war, having access agreements with the S.P.L.A. and the Sudanese government.

Neither side in the conflict seems able to strike a decisive blow. The leadership of the Sudanese government has changed hands twice since the S.P.L.A.'s war against it began—Nimeiri was deposed in 1985, and the civilian government that followed was in turn overthrown by a 1989 military coup backed by radical Islamists. Colonel (later Lieutenant General) Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir led the 1989 coup and became President, but the maximum leader of the revolutionary regime he installed was and remains a former law-school dean named Hassan al-Turabi. The Turabi regime banned most "nonreligious institutions," such as labor unions and political parties, and ruthlessly repressed dissent. Some former Sudanese officials—the Islamists purged nearly eighty thousand members of the Army, the police, and the state bureaucracy—joined the rebels, and a number of neighboring countries, among them Uganda, Eritrea, and post-Mengistu Ethiopia, noting that Sudan had begun aiding armed opposition groups from *their* countries, began to lend support to the S.P.L.A. Some not so neighboring countries, such as Israel and the United States, noting that Sudan had become an important haven for international terrorists, including the now famous Saudi fighter Osama bin Laden, also grew better disposed toward the rebels. In late 1997, Madeleine Albright even met with John Garang, the S.P.L.A. commander, in Uganda.

The United States, having added Sudan, in 1993, to the list of countries that it believes sponsor international terrorism, imposed comprehensive economic sanctions in 1997. Nevertheless, the Turabi regime has managed a vast arms buildup, obtaining weapons from, among other countries, China, Russia, Iran, and Iraq. This buildup has come on top of a large preëxisting base of military hardware provided, ironically, by the United States during the Cold War, when Sudan was seen as an anti-Soviet bulwark against Ethiopia.

Although local ceasefires are called to allow for famine relief, and the government has rewarded defecting S.P.L.A. senior commanders with comfortable jobs, even Cabinet-level posts, few serious negotiations to end the war have taken place in the nine years since the Turabi regime seized power. The Islamists' determination to win the civil war militarily—the leadership constantly refers to the conflict in the absolutist terms of jihad—has devastated not only the South but also the northern Sudanese economy. The government, while trying to run one of the world's poorest countries, spends more than a million dollars a day on the war. Its Army now has seventy-five thousand regular troops, eighty-five thousand reserves, and fifteen thousand active irregulars. These irregulars—and they do not include many tribal militias armed by the government, or thousands of troops still under former S.P.L.A. commanders, who retain their independence—fight, for the most part, in Iranian-trained militias called People's Defense Forces, which are among the most feared units in the war. The P.D.F. militias specialize in bloody raids against southern civilians, and in some areas they have helped reintroduce that old staple of North-South relations in Sudan: slavery.

The Rizeigat, cattle-herding Arabs in western Sudan, live just north of Dinka country. They sing, "*Shiil abu sofeet abu naar harraag al kubuud / Dar li rassaal min al abiid al suud*" ("Carry the jim gun whose fire chars the liver and the heart / For I need an errand boy from the black slaves"). And they sing, "*Ya rizeigi minawir al kay / Addaar bala*

FORMAGGIO

The world
was whole because
it shattered. When it shattered,
then we knew what it was.

It never healed itself.
But in the deep fissures, smaller worlds appeared:
it was a good thing that human beings made them;
human beings know what they need,
better than any god.

On Huron Avenue they became
a block of stores; they became
Fishmonger, Formaggio. Whatever
they were or sold, they were
alike in their function: they were
visions of safety. Like
a resting place. The salespeople
were like parents; they appeared
to live there. On the whole,
kinder than parents.

Tributaries
feeding into a large river: I had

many lives. In the provisional world,
I stood where the fruit was,
flats of cherries, clementines,
under Hallie's flowers.

I had many lives. Feeding
into a river, the river
feeding into a great ocean. If the self
becomes invisible has it disappeared?

I thrived. I lived
not completely alone, alone
but not completely, strangers
surging around me.

That's what the sea is:
we exist in secret.

I had lives before this, stems
of a spray of flowers: they became
one thing, held by a ribbon at the center, a ribbon
visible under the hand. Above the hand,
the branching future, stems
ending in flowers. And the gripped fist—
that would be the self in the present.

—Louise Glück

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siid siibu ley" ("Hey, Rizeigi man, you are the burning iron rod / Give me the land without a people"). And "*Daar askun buhuur al saiid*" ("I long to go and live by the rivers of the South").

The Rizeigat, like their Arab neighbors to the east, the Misseriya, covet the Dinka pasturelands, which are lusher than their own (increasingly so, as the Saharan sands creep south). Historically, the Rizeigat were also energetic slavers, preying on their black southern neighbors until the British finally stamped out the practice in the nineteen-thirties. In the late colonial period, there was peace—trade, grazing agreements, even some intermarriage—between the Rizeigat and the Dinka. But now the Rizeigat, like Arab tribes throughout the North, have been armed and organized by Khartoum into P.D.F. units and tribal militias known as *murahaliin.* And each year, during the dry season, the Rizeigat are sent southward on jihad.

I flew to northern Dinka country in late September, during the wet season. All the western tributaries of the White Nile were in flood, making land travel—and, more to the point, troop movements and militia raids—virtually impossible. The plane was an old British Hawker Siddeley, which was carrying fishhooks and Australian maize to a village called Nyamlell, six hundred air miles northwest of the Kenyan border. Nyamlell sits on a peninsula in the Lol River, fifty miles south of the Bahr al-Arab River, which is the boundary between North and South in western Sudan. The air there was unnervingly thick and moist. The Nilotic plain, half submerged, seemed endless, like an ocean being sailed by a scattered armada of ethereal trees.

Nyamlell has been suffering seasonal raids by the Rizeigat and the Misseriya for fifteen years, and the S.P.L.A.'s defense of the area has been mostly ineffectual, but the local Dinka have refused to abandon their lands. This year, however, they got hit harder than ever.

"The Arabs attacked four times," Martin Mawiens Dut, a village magistrate, told me. "It was in May. The last time they came, I was out clearing land. It was in the morning. They came on horses, on camels, on donkeys, on foot, in Toyota pickup trucks with machine guns. It was the Army and the P.D.F. and the *murahaliin*, all together." This combined force, in particular the Army's leading role, represented an escalation from previous raids, people told me. Some villagers even recalled tanks rumbling into Nyamlell this time. "They conquered the town, burning it down, taking slaves for six or seven days," Mr. Dut said. "They collected all the cattle and goats and people from the area, then drove them all to the North. Those of us who were not caught came creeping back from the bush. We found many corpses, mostly men. The women and children, they took. They took my wife, Adhal Akoom, and my daughter, Amin, and my son, Kon. He is five years old."

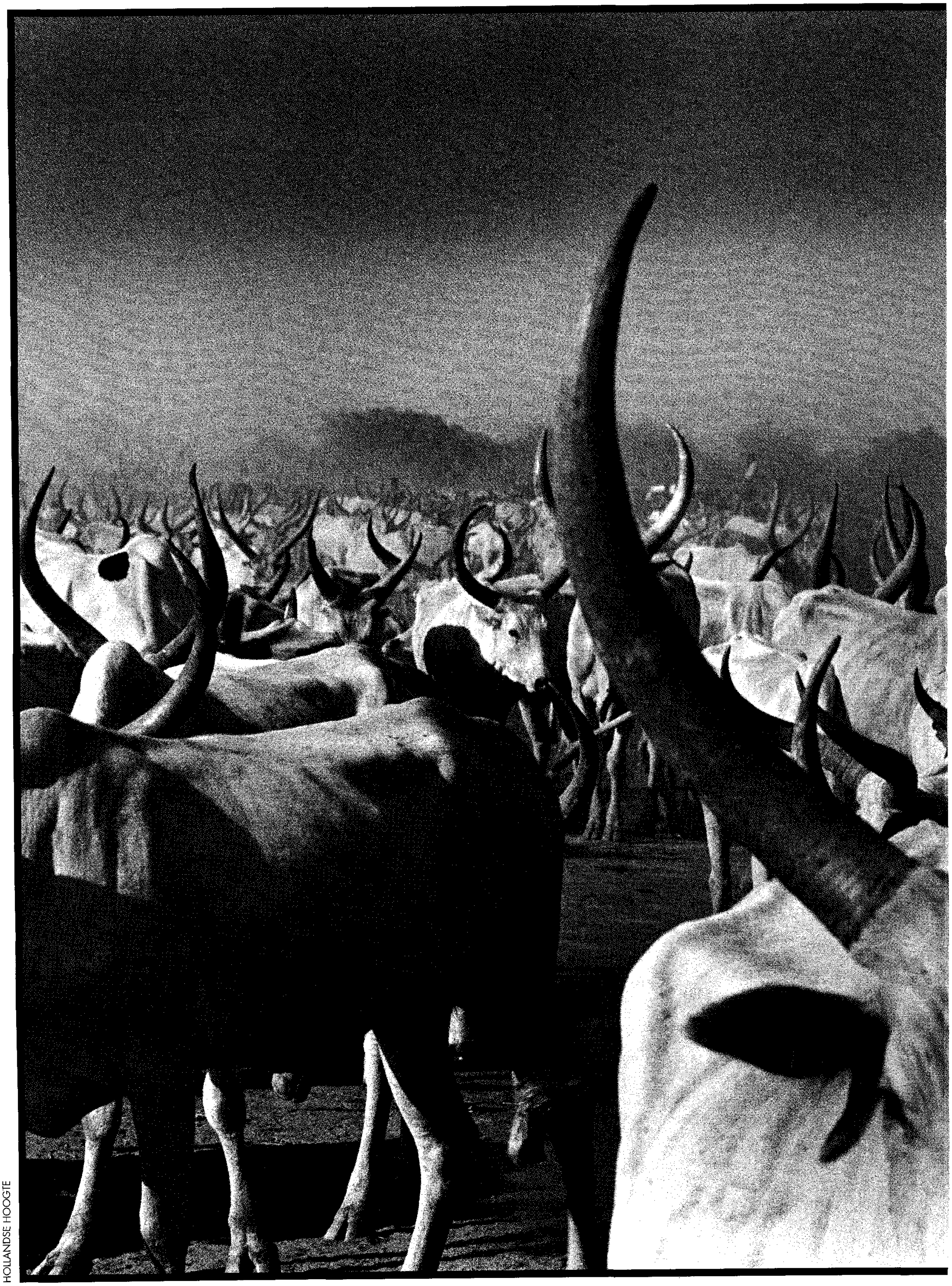
I asked Mr. Dut if he had heard anything since from his family.

"No. I have no information about them."

He looked away. Mr. Dut was a thin, distinguished-looking man in his late sixties. He wore a faded, meticulously patched safari suit and rubber sandals. It had been four months since the catastrophic raid. The dead had been buried, and the people of Nyamlell were busy rebuilding their village. But the raiders had taken pains to burn all the nearby papyrus fields, which normally provide the thatch for roofs, and the result was that many families were still living in rough shelters—fire-cracked mud walls with sheets of plastic thrown across them. (The plastic came from Concern Worldwide, an Irish relief group that has a program to feed and immunize mothers and children in the area. Concern had also brought in the fishhooks.)

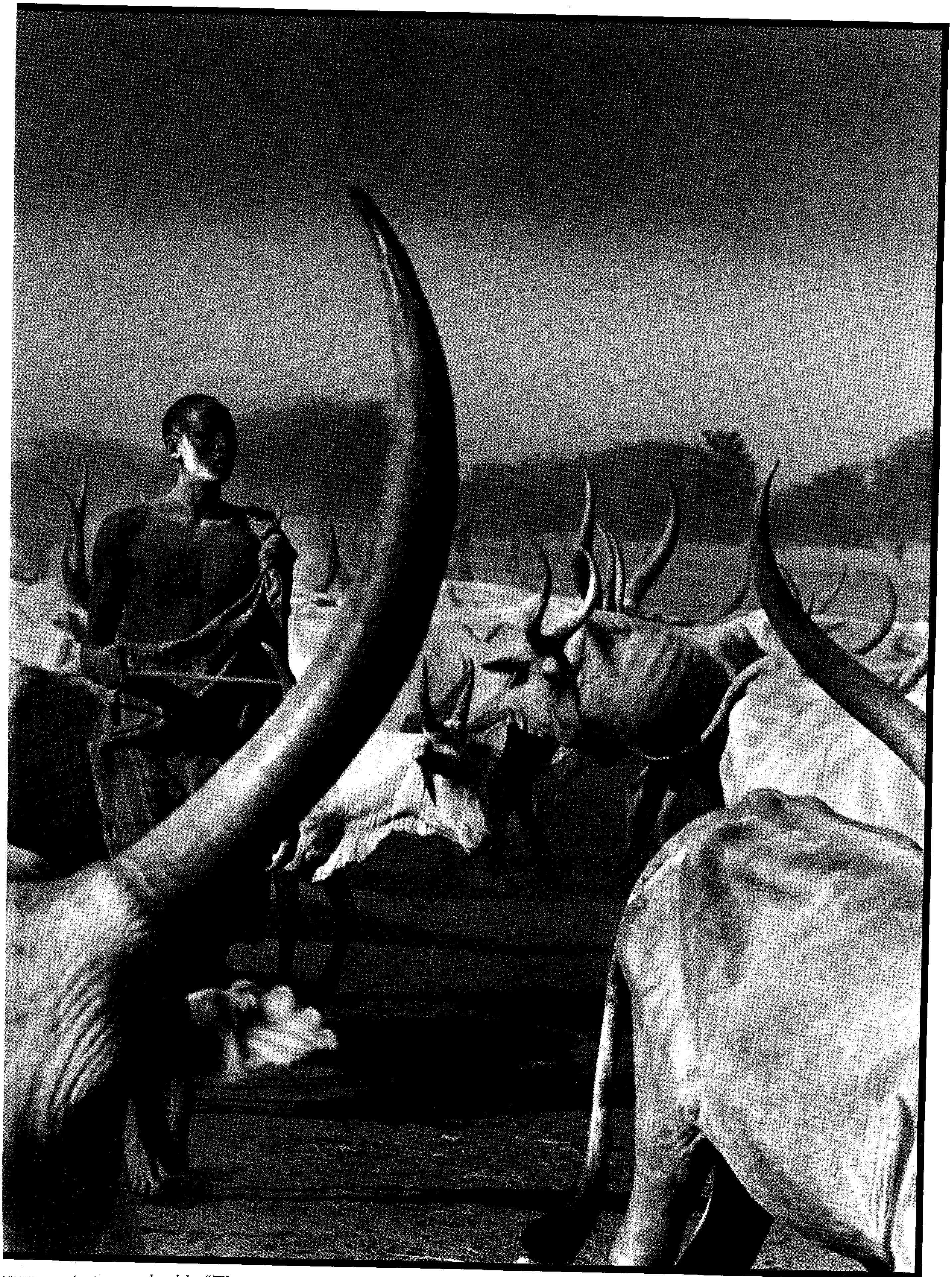
"The Djellabah even chopped down the mango trees," Mr. Dut went on. "Djellabah"—the hooded cloak worn by Arab men—is a common southern Sudanese term for Arabs. "They broke the clay pots we use to carry water. They try to destroy *everything* now, so that we will not come back."

Mr. Dut, like other educated Sudanese of his generation, spoke good English—it had been the language of instruction in his day. Another, much younger magistrate who was sitting with us spoke more haltingly. He had been educated in Arabic, he explained. Mr. Dut, who owned a little battery-operated radio, was also a devoted listener to the BBC World Service, and had a great many opinions about American politics. He was incensed about the Monica



HOLLANDSE HOOGTE

The lives of several million Dinka people are centered on their cattle herds, which have been devastated by the civil war and



vernment-sponsored raids. "They try to destroy everything now, so that we will not come back." Photograph by Teun Voeten.

Lewinsky scandal. How could a great country like America waste its time, he asked, on such a silly business? Couldn't the United States concern itself instead with something serious—such as bringing about an all-parties peace conference for Sudan? "Only the Americans can do it," Mr. Dut said.

The three of us were sitting on rough stools near the riverbank in the market at Nyamlell. The market was really just a couple of dozen haphazard lean-tos made from burlap and branches, under which people traded for fish or bloody slabs of goat or tiny bags of salt or tobacco. A crowd of flyblown children collected around us, but whenever the kids crept too close Mr. Dut would shout and lay about him with a carved walking stick, and they would retreat, giggling.

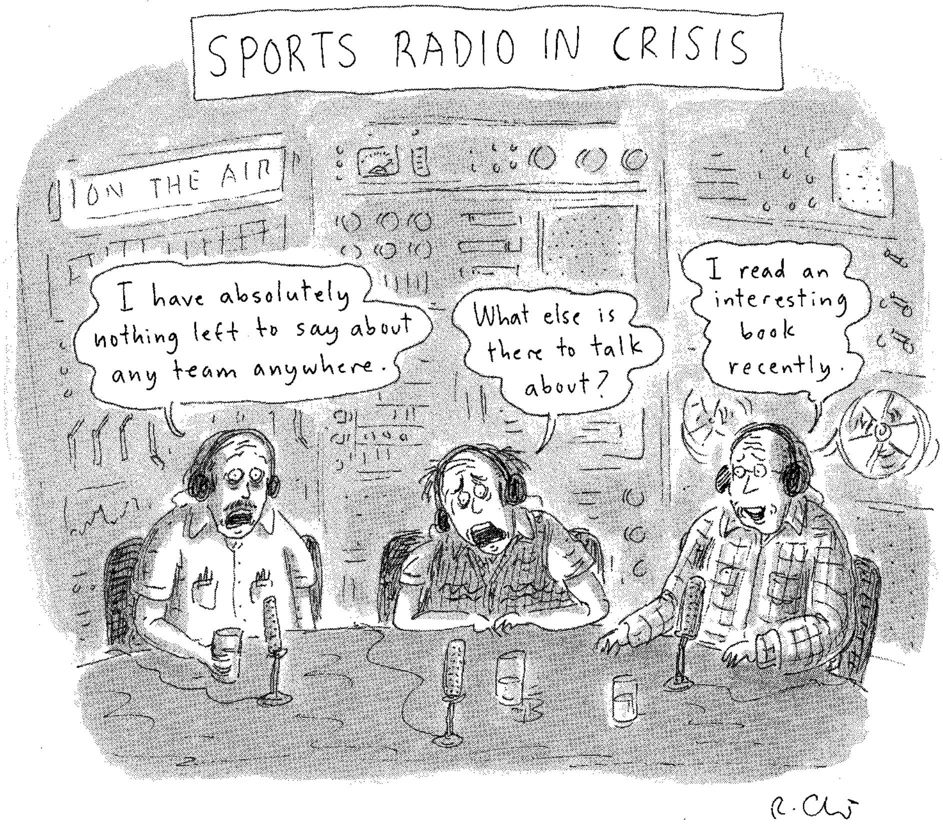
Some of the children were very thin, but the Dinka tend to be tall—often extraordinarily tall—and thin. People in Nyamlell, having lost their herds, were obviously hungry, but there was reportedly no starvation in the district. The sorghum plots around the village were, after the rains, a dreamy dark green, with yellow-topped stalks seven feet high. Fishermen were out on the gray river in dugout canoes at dawn, throwing nets. Except for the occasional S.P.L.A. fighter with his Kalashnikov, though, there were few young men to be seen around Nyamlell.

"Oh, very few," Mr. Dut said. "So many young men have been killed in the war, leaving many unmarried young women. And now the Arabs have taken our women, too. And we've lost our cattle for bride wealth, so people cannot marry anyway. But when everyone is so hungry and gloomy they don't feel like getting married." Marriage being the great preoccupation of Dinka society—right up there with cattle, to which it is closely tied by the custom of paying cattle to a bride's family—the magistrate's lament was a profound one.

The next morning, I watched some men slaughter a cow. This was not a good sign. The Dinka don't usually slaughter cows. They drink their milk and, through small incisions, their blood, but they normally eat beef only on ceremonial occasions or when an animal dies of natural causes. This cow, perfectly healthy, would have ordinarily been in a herd that was preparing to leave for the *toic*—the grasslands that would soon emerge on the floodplain. It was being butchered because food was short. A nimble old man caught in a pot at least a gallon of blood as it spurted from the jugular, and an hour later I saw him sitting under assorted joints of fresh beef hanging from a tree in the Nyamlell market.

I CAMPED on the tip of the Nyamlell peninsula, out beyond the ruins of the old district commissioner's house. I had brought along a flimsy tent, and a young Dinka, noting that my tent was not really rainworthy, suggested I pitch it inside an empty *tukul*, or beehive-shaped hut, on the point. He helped me chase a herd of indignant frogs from the *tukul*, then inspected the rotten roof thatch for snakes. I found a piece of U.N. plywood to jam in the doorway. The *tukul* was decrepit—maybe that was why the Rizeigat hadn't bothered to burn it. It appeared to have been abandoned for some time, and I found myself wondering if its last occupants might have been taken north as slaves.

There was so much to try to imagine in Nyamlell. I had seen one or two Dinka bulls at a distance from the village, their tremendous, lyre-shaped horns gliding above the tall grass. They were a reminder that everything one saw on a visit to a Dinka village was incidental, basically, to the real business, the main event, of Dinka life—the *wut*, or cattle camp, which moves with the seasons. There are Dinka groups who primarily fish or farm, but cattle-herding is the unrivalled center of Dinka social, economic, and religious life. Nyamlell might be the *baai*, the homestead, where grain is grown, but the *wut* is where a clan's wealth lives. "The *wut* is my nation," some Dinkas say, when asked about their political loyalties, and one *wut* may in fact wage war against another.


SPORTS RADIO IN CRISIS
ON THE AIR
I have absolutely nothing left to say about any team anywhere.
What else is there to talk about?
I read an interesting book recently.

On the other hand, the idea of a "Dinka" nation is thoroughly misleading. The name derives by most accounts from a European explorer's poor transcription of one local chief's name. When I asked people around Nyamlell about their ethnicity, most said "Malual," which is a large tribal group, encompassing a great many *wut*. Nobody said "Dinka." There is a Dinka language, shared, in many versions, by everyone conventionally described as Dinka, and its speakers have in common many cultural values and practices. But there is not and never has been a Dinka paramount chief.

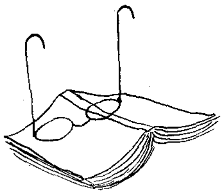
The Dinka are a widely scattered, surprisingly diverse group of three or four million people. They have little apparent interest in anyone else's land (they are known for believing that they already live in paradise) or in converting anyone to their religion. Attempts by outsiders and modernizers, including the would-be nation-builders, many of them educated Dinkas, of the S.P.L.A., to impose their own social ideas and political hopes on the emphatically local and premodern reality of Nilotic pastoral life are, by definition, always imprecise and unwieldy. But the war has disrupted every aspect of Dinka life. Millions of cattle have been stolen, draining the life from the *wut*. In some parts of Bahr al-Ghazal, which is the southwestern province that contains Nyamlell, there have reportedly been no coming-of-age ceremonies for twenty years. Marriages have been prevented or postponed on a disastrous scale. Displacement by fighting has undermined countless communities and countless ancient intercommunal relationships.

It has also caused starvation and, in the process, fostered a confusing, degrading dependence on international relief. Earlier this year, a pocket of famine developed around Wau, a government-held town, after a former S.P.L.A. commander who had defected to the government re-defected and attacked a government garrison. The fighting that followed drove tens of thousands of people into the bush on treks that many did not survive. The international response was slow, and the government, in its genocidal mode, imposed a ban for two months on relief flights, so for a while the death rate, even in feeding camps around Wau, rose as high as sixty-three per ten thousand per day. Anything higher than two per ten thousand per day is considered by relief experts to be an emergency.

And it is not only Arabs who have laid waste to Dinka country. The double defector from Wau, a Dinka warlord named Kwanyin Kerubino Bol, previously ravaged, while working for the government, a large area north of Wau. (Shortly after Christmas, Kerubino defected yet again, back to Khartoum.) And, farther south, after the 1991 defection of some of John Garang's top commanders, dissident troops went on a rampage through Bor County that left thousands of civilians dead. These troops were mostly Nuer fighters massacring Garang's Dinka clansmen, and the experience was so traumatic that large numbers of the Dinka survivors in Bor later converted to Christianity. Their world had simply ceased to make sense: the old clan divinities had failed them; perhaps the missionaries' God would be a better protector.

The war has been stampeding people into a desperate, defensive modernity—giving them new, frightened connections to the world beyond the Sudd—by destroying the ancient, supple, and proud world they had made over the centuries for themselves. The Dinka love to compose songs, and a pastor from Bor gave voice to some of his people's anguish:

I am in the sinful land of Sudan.
The birds in the sky are surprised
by the way I have been orphaned.
The animals of the forest
are startled by my skeleton.



It was midafternoon, and while I was hiding from the heat in my *tukul* a young man came to fetch me. An Arab had brought more than a hundred villagers back from captivity in the North, he said—local people who had been taken as slaves in May. He was waiting with them near the airstrip.

I hurried to the airstrip, and was directed past a stand of thorn trees. There I found a large group of haggard-looking women, children, and old people sitting on the ground, and a tall, middle-aged Arab in a white djellabah and turban standing over them. The Arab was watching me carefully. An S.P.L.A. official named Gregory Garank Akok was on hand, and he told me that the Arab did not speak English, so he himself, Mr. Akok, would translate for me.

The Arab said he came from El Da'ein, a Rizeigat town some two hundred miles north of Nyamlell, in Darfur Province. He said his name was Ibrahim Muhammad Hamdan—although when I asked if that was his real name he admitted it wasn't. What he was doing, he said, was extremely dangerous. The government had been coming to El Da'ein to recruit for the P.D.F. "They take normal people and train them to come and loot in the South," he said. "They arm them and tell them, 'Kill the young men, but bring back the cattle and the women.' I even have P.D.F. looters in my own family. But many people in El Da'ein don't agree with the government. They don't want the war. They say, 'If the South must secede for us to have peace, then let them secede.' But you cannot say that publicly, or you will be killed."

I asked about the slaves in El Da'ein.

"Some of the slaves look after the cattle. Some work in the fields, or build houses for their owners. Small children are taken to the mosque to become Muslims. Some slaves dig latrines. If they refuse to work, they are beaten. Many are taken to El Obeid, or to Khartoum State, where they may work on big farms."

The Arab said that he was a grain farmer, and that he sometimes employed Malual Dinka in his fields but he paid them. There were different types of Muslims, he said, and his type believed that slavery was wrong, and so he and some associates tried to help kidnapped Dinkas escape. They had managed to collect a hundred and thirty-eight escaped slaves from the Nyamlell area, and had spent ten days walking south with them through the marshes. He knew the way from previous trips, he said. Four people had died en route, and many had caught pneumonia. (A background mutter of hacking coughs and sighs from the people on the ground confirmed this part of the story.) His team of accomplices, the Arab said, was now waiting on the north bank of the Lol.

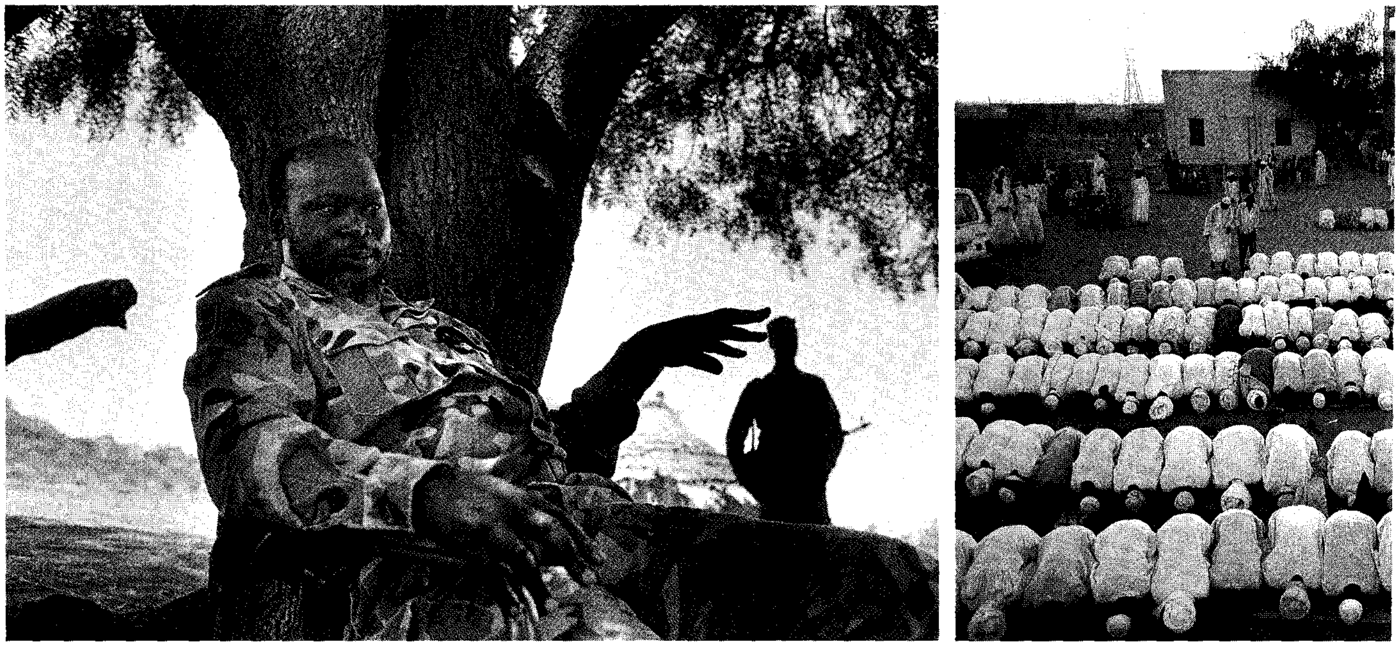
What were they waiting for?

"We are waiting to be paid," the Arab said.

It seemed that in previous years the Arab and his team had transported escaped slaves back to Twic County, in Dinka country, about a hundred miles east of Nyamlell, and that they had been paid for their trouble by a group called Christian Solidarity Worldwide. The president of Christian Solidarity Worldwide is Baroness Caroline Cox, of Queensbury. Did I, by any chance, know Lady Cox? Her organization had paid fifty U.S. dollars for each returned slave.

Gathering that I did not know—and did not know even how to contact—Lady Cox, the Arab grimaced with disappointment. In the end, he said in a resigned tone, he and his team might have to accept whatever the families of the escaped slaves could pay.

I later managed to interview separately, with a different translator, two young women who had escaped from El



From left: The rebel leader John Garang says he is fighting for a united, secular Sudan; Sufis at prayer; the Islamist governmen

FROM LEFT: SEBASTIÃO SALGADO/CONTACT; PASCAL MAITRE/COSMOS/MATRIX; RADHIKA CHALASANI/SIPA

Da'ein and trudged home to Nyamlell through the marshes, led by the Arab and his team. One of them, Ayok Kuac Dut, was eighteen. She had narrow features and light-brown eyes. She had first run east when the *murahaliin* came, she said, but she had been caught, along with her two young children. The Arabs had killed her husband, a civilian, by slitting his throat. They had locked her and her children in one of the storerooms in the old district commissioner's house. Ms. Dut nodded at the storeroom she meant, which was just a few yards behind me. Her level gaze made me shiver in the tropical heat. She and her children had been taken north by truck. She remembered crossing the Bahr al-Arab—though she called the river by its Dinka name, the Kiir. In El Da'ein, she had been separated from her children and sent to work in the fields. There was an Arab who wanted her for his wife, but there was another who said she should be killed, for she was too cunning. Before either plan could be carried out, she had used her cunning and escaped—leaving her children behind.

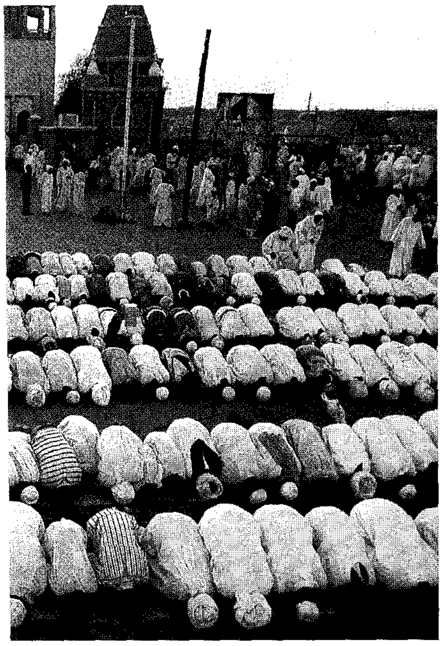
The other young woman, Abuk Deng Garang, was twenty and very pregnant with her fourth child. She, too, had been widowed in the final raid in May. Her husband had been an S.P.L.A. fighter, trained in Ethiopia. She had been separated from her three young children on the trip north, and had been beaten. She believed she would have been killed, she said quietly, if she hadn't been pregnant. Ibrahim, as she called the Arab who brought the group back to Nyamlell, had helped her to escape. Both she and Ms. Dut said that he and his team had also brought escaped slaves back to Nyamlell in previous years. In fact, they said, Ibrahim actually lived here in Nyamlell, not in El Da'ein. His mother had been a Malual Dinka; only his father had been a Rizeigat. He still had family here in Nyamlell. Ibrahim himself had been kidnapped by the *murahaliin*, and would surely not return to the North, as I seemed to think he would.

As I listened to these startling new twists in the story of the slaves' rescuer, I half expected the young women to burst out laughing at my expression, which was undoubtedly dumbfounded. But they remained serious, even grave. I thanked them for their time, then continued to ask around Nyamlell about Ibrahim, hoping to stitch together some approximation of the facts.

Oddly, the most passionate and detailed theory I got came weeks later, in Khartoum, in the air-conditioned office of an American-educated linguist and researcher named Ushari Mahmud. "I really think I know who that is," Mahmud said eagerly. "That's almost surely Doka Awut. His mother was Dinka. He's had dealings with Baroness Cox. He also goes by the name Adam Ali."

Mahmud has been researching the resurgence of slavery in Sudan for more than a decade. His research has not made him popular with the government, and he was thrown in jail after publishing a booklet, in 1987, about a massacre of more than a thousand Dinka at El Da'ein. When the Turabi regime took power, in 1989, Mahmud was jailed again, without charges, for two years. He was excited to hear that I had recently been in northern Bahr al-Ghazal. "That's one of the main centers of the slave trade," he said. "That is where the Army is afraid the war may break into the North, so they've been trying to depopulate the area—to get the Dinka off the land any way they can. The hub of the slave trade for southern Darfur is Abu Mataariq, a town between Nyamlell and El Da'ein. That's where Doka Awut actually lives. And he *participates* in the slave raids and then tries to offer himself as a peacemaker with the Dinka, and he sells some of the slaves back to their families."

I was not completely convinced that we were talking about the same man, but I was curious about Mahmud's description of other facets of Sudanese slavery. "Army officers, when they return from the South, often bring black children with them," he said. "They hand them out to relatives, for work around the house. People don't even see it as slavery. But that's what it is. President Bashir himself has two or three children he found in the South. And, of course, the children are raised as Muslims. It's part of the government's campaign to Arabize the country. But then the word itself we use for a black person, *abd*, means 'slave.'



ains men in northern Sudan to wage jihad against the people of the South, most of whom follow traditional African religions.

So slavery is very, very deep in Sudanese Arab culture. Sometimes a southern family will come to the North and find their children and bring a court case to get them back. But that is rare. Otherwise, all this goes on invisibly."

In times of famine, it must be said, parents in the South have also been known to sell their children to outsiders to save them from starvation. In Wau last year, hundreds of desperate widows gave up their children for adoption.

To me, perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the mystery surrounding Nyamlell's slave rescuer was his relationship with the S.P.L.A. If he was in fact a double-dealer, running a nefarious business, could the local rebels possibly be in league with his operation? They certainly seemed to endorse his work.

THE S.P.L.A. is a descendant of the South's guerrilla army from the first civil war, a force known as Anya-Nya One. John Garang, for instance, fought for Anya-Nya One. He later served, during the peace interim, in the government Army. A man of many talents, he also earned a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from Iowa State University, where he wrote his thesis on an immense government construction project called the Jonglei Canal, a two-hundred-mile ditch across the Nile floodplain of southern Sudan. The canal's purpose was to redirect the White Nile away from the Sudd—the world's largest swamp—so that its water could be used for irrigation or possibly sold to Egypt. Many southern Sudanese feared that the canal would turn the Sudd into a desert, destroying the world of millions of Nilotic tribesmen. In 1983, when the South mutinied, Garang turned against the government and helped create the S.P.L.A.—and ordered a halt to work on the canal. It is said that a Briton was operating the main piece of digging equipment when the S.P.L.A.'s guerrillas showed up, and that he declined to shut it down. The rebels shot him through the head.

At that time, the S.P.L.A. was basically a Dinka-led guerrilla group. But its troops received extensive training from Ethiopia and, in the early years, Cuba, and it eventually became a conventional, though unusually impoverished, African army. Today, it fields somewhere between twenty and thirty thousand fighters.

Internationally, the S.P.L.A.'s status as a national-liberation movement has never solidified, in part because its goals are unclear: Garang says he is fighting for a secular, united Sudan, but many of his commanders and followers are clearly fighting for an independent South. Christian churches and Christian evangelical groups in the West are concerned about the persecution by Khartoum of their brethren in southern Sudan but are somewhat stymied by the fact that few southerners are actually Christians. (The majority follow traditional African religions.) Finally, while the Cold War was still on, the S.P.L.A. found itself shunned in the West because of its dependence on a Soviet client state, Mengistu's Ethiopia, not to mention its own Marxist pretensions.

Shortly before Mengistu's fall, in 1991, the S.P.L.A. lost its rear bases and its major sponsor. The amount of territory that the rebels controlled shrank, particularly after some of Garang's top commanders defected, taking thousands of troops with them. These commanders joined the government, and their forces were deployed against the S.P.L.A. The rebels survived these travails, barely, and then, after 1994, came storming back with new, social-democratic rhetoric and a new set of allies, and captured a string of important southern towns and vast tracts of ever more immiserated land.

More important, in 1995 the S.P.L.A. formed its first lasting alliance with northern opposition groups—the traditional Muslim political parties that have been driven underground or into exile by the Islamists. Calling itself the National Democratic Alliance, and naming Garang its commander-in-chief, this fragile, unlikely coalition—after all, some of its northern principals had fought ferociously *against* the S.P.L.A. during the post-Nimeiri period, when *they* were in power in Khartoum—has opened at least two new fronts in the war. Operating from Eritrea, the northern armed groups have attacked Sudan from the east, threatening strategic assets such as the highway from Khartoum to Port Sudan, on the Red Sea, and a major Blue Nile dam

"I preferred their 'Take a number' system."

• •

that supplies eighty per cent of Khartoum's electric power.

And yet the S.P.L.A.'s political wing—the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement—remains poorly developed, failing to rally much support among the broad mass of peasants in the South. Indeed, the rebels often alienate, through abuses and depredations, the southerners (usually non-Dinka) whose lands they control. Having to rely on local resources for food, as the S.P.L.A.'s troops do, is a recipe for friction. The movement, moreover, being fundamentally military, is highly authoritarian, and deals harshly with dissent. Its recruitment methods are harsh as well. While school-educated young southerners, especially Dinkas, have often flocked to its training camps, eager to serve, many other young people have joined on the basis of S.P.L.A. promises that they would receive schooling, and have instead found themselves trained and sent to the battlefront, still uneducated and often woefully underage, like little Simon Ater.

"To Whom It May Concern," people said when one of the government's bombs came spinning out of the sky. You could hear them, people said, as they approached the ground: there was a little tail rotor that hummed.

I was in Lokutok, a village in Torit County, in Eastern Equatoria, which is a sprawling province in Sudan's far south. I was camping under a tree in a yard that belonged to Catholic Relief Services. Lokutok sits in a beautiful spot, at the edge of an immense plain and the foot of a jagged range of peaks. The mountains, known as the Lopit, snag enough rain to turn their slopes a deep, waterfall-traced, tropical green. The village earth is red, its sorghum tall and lush. The people, also known as Lopit, are farmers and cattle-keepers. They have coal-black skin and play little high-pitched flutes, night and day.

Like most southern Sudanese, they have had the war wash cruelly back and forth across their land for as long as most of them can recall. At the time I visited, there was a three-month ceasefire up in Bahr al-Ghazal, ostensibly to allow the delivery of relief supplies there. (The rainy season always stopped the fighting anyway.) But here the war was still on, with a vengeance. A couple of weeks earlier, the S.P.L.A. had launched a major offensive, seizing a number of small towns and garrisons along the road running east from Juba, the South's capital city (Juba, which is on the White Nile, is the command headquarters for the government's war effort), to Torit, a town of twelve thousand that is just twenty-five miles west of Lokutok. The rebels had reportedly taken large hauls of government armor. Now they were shelling—and predicting the imminent fall of—Torit. Peasants were fleeing in this direction, and the Antonov—the plane the government uses for most of its bombings—had become a regular visitor.

On my second morning in Lokutok, an Antonov came inching over the mountains. A deep silence fell instantly over the village. Even the flutes, which never stopped twittering, went quiet. I listened, not breathing, for the humming of a bomb's tail rotor. But all I could hear was the faraway drone of the Antonov's engine.

The Antonov is a cargo plane, and the Sudanese Army's pilots, wary of the S.P.L.A.'s anti-aircraft guns, fly it only at high altitude—more than ten thousand feet—if they are anywhere near the front. And so their bombs, which are simply rolled out the back of the plane, are famously inaccurate. They are addressed, in effect, to whomever they find. Still, when the Antonovs bomb, you don't want to be standing out in the open. You want to be close to the ground or, better yet, under the ground. I had been told this more than once, but my instincts were poor and my reactions slow, and so I found myself peering at the Antonov, a white speck in a soft-blue sky, and was only dimly aware that the great silence had fallen. It even took me a minute to notice that the men I had been talking with a moment before—two Sudanese relief workers—were now suddenly standing forty yards away, half-crouched at the sandbagged mouth of a rude bomb shelter, seemingly listening with their entire bodies.

Why the government's Antonovs, which were flying out of Juba, were bombing little Lokutok, where there were virtually no rebel soldiers, instead of the massed S.P.L.A. forces besieging their comrades inside Torit, seemed to me a fair question. The Lopit mountains, between Lokutok and Torit, are narrow and dramatic, making the two places presumably impossible to confuse. Indeed, the Antonovs had to fly *past* Torit to get here. The lack of air defenses in Lokutok might have had something to do with it. So, probably, did the grain being stockpiled there by the U.N. World Food Program in anticipation of the arrival of thousands of hungry people if Torit did fall. Neither of these was a legitimate reason to target Lokutok. But the Sudanese government has never bothered with the laws of war when it comes to aerial bombing. (Nor when it comes to prisoners of war. After decades of fighting, the regime has no enemies in custody.) In recent years, hundreds of civilian targets—including hospitals, churches, and refugee camps—have been bombed deliberately. If such atrocities were perpetrated elsewhere—if Milosevic were to unleash similar air attacks on Kosovo, say—the outside world would probably be outraged to the point of action. In southern Sudan, it might as well be happening on the dark side of the moon.

Still, I stood there in the C.R.S. yard, embarrassed to sprint for the bomb shelter when I could see villagers standing outside their *tukuls*, carefully watching the sky but not yet taking cover. And then I saw the two men poised at the shelter entrance start to relax, and rise from their crouches, and I, too, began to breathe again.

The Antonov continued a slow crawl across the sky, its crew apparently having decided to terrorize some other village, or maybe just to fly reconnaissance. Although the warplanes had been coming over the mountains each morning, it had been a couple of weeks, people said, since any bombs had landed on Lokutok. The last bomb had made a big hole in the earth, and a tree beside the hole looked as if a sadistic giant had attacked it, tearing off its branches and ripping huge red gashes in its trunk. A farmer who was nearby that day had done the right thing, pressing himself into the earth and surviving with just a shrapnel wound in the buttock. That bomb had actually landed a fair distance—perhaps two hundred yards—from the C.R.S. yard, but another piece of shrapnel had torn through the tent of a Kenyan relief worker who was camping, I was told, under the same tree that I was. The Kenyan had been down in the shelter, where he belonged. The shrapnel had punctured a can of mosquito repellent in his tent, then melted a hole in the floor.

It is easy to say, with the weight of international law behind one, that U.N. grain stores are not a legitimate military target. But in truth the role of international relief in a civil war such as Sudan's is always problematic. Food-distribution sites draw hungry people. One army may be pleased, for its own reasons, to see certain people move in a certain direction; its opponent may want to see something entirely different happen. Rarely is either side thinking disinterestedly about civilian welfare; each is always intent on strategic advantage. In Sudan, both sides have used scorched-earth tactics when local civilians were thought likely to help the enemy. And intervention by outside agencies nearly always has a political, if not a military, impact on the ground.

Moreover, the international relief effort has arguably prolonged the war in Sudan, if only by keeping enough people alive to fight it. "Diversion" of relief supplies away from the civilians they are meant for—whether to warlords and their fighters or to pure profiteers—is a problem in every war. These diversions can be clear-cut cases, in which a hundred sacks of any shipment are simply delivered, by agreement with local officials, to the local barracks (I heard of such cases in Sudan), or they can be murkier—situations, say, in which distribution through local clan networks (by far the most efficient method) inevitably includes fighters who are local men. And when people are hungry, anywhere, there is no chance, ever, that armed men will be among the first to starve.

Clothes, medicine, tools, seeds, clean water—each of these can, at times, be as important as food. Each also, unfortunately, can be seen (and used) as a weapon of war. Even a hospital—the most basic humanitarian institution—has obvious strategic significance. Soldiers who know that they can be evacuated to a hospital if they are wounded will simply fight harder than soldiers who know that if *they* are wounded they will most likely lie for days in the bush, learning more about gangrene than they want to know. The wounded fighter who can get to a hospital is far more likely, for that matter, to live to fight another day. The Sudanese Army, heeding this battlefield reality and flouting the rules of war, regularly bombs a hospital run by a Norwegian aid organization in Yei, an S.P.L.A. stronghold in Western Equatoria, on the safe assumption that it treats a lot of rebel wounded.

But international relief does not flow only to rebel-held areas in Sudan. In some months, there are just as many civilians under government rule being fed by Operation Lifeline Sudan. And this is another way in which humanitarian relief may be said to prolong the war. Sudan, while ostensibly unable to feed its own people, and relying on the international community to do so, today exports hundreds of thousands of tons of sorghum, which it produces on modern, irrigated farms in the North. These exports earn precious foreign exchange, which enables the government to shop in the international weapons bazaar, and thus to keep waging its civil war in the style to which it has become accustomed.

ONE evening, a group of us sat under the tree in the yard of Catholic Relief Services telling war stories while the moon sank into the mountains. From some toylike hamlets that cling to the narrow ridges above Lokutok, there was a constant, frenzied tootling of flutes, interspersed, occasionally, with bursts of gunfire—people celebrating an "elopement," someone guessed.

The story that stayed with me from that evening was about the siege of Juba. Juba, which has a refugee-bloated population of some three hundred thousand and has been loosely surrounded by the S.P.L.A. since 1986, has been subjected to a great deal of rebel shelling. In 1991, which was a very bad year in Juba, the storyteller's uncle had been playing dominoes in a park with friends. An S.P.L.A. shell landed in the park, and a large piece of shrapnel decapitated the player sitting next to him. The headless man's reaction to his misfortune was not to keel over in a grisly heap, however, but to seize the storyteller's uncle in a desperate embrace. And so the two men had wrestled, falling off their chairs, kicking over their dominoes, arms locked around each other in a hellish grapple that lasted longer than anyone would have thought possible. Afterward, the uncle was in profound shock. He did not speak for days. Finally, a meeting was held, at which a number of clan elders spoke, and religious consolation was offered. The uncle was invited to speak. He found his voice. "I have seen death," he said. "I have fought death. I am no longer afraid."

In Lokutok, hundreds of peasants suddenly arrived one morning. They had come from the villages north of Torit, ready to collect the supplies—seeds, hoes, maize—that had been airlifted here for them. Valuable commodities don't tend to sit around undisturbed very long in southern Sudan. The villagers had walked all day and all night, circling north around the mountains, to avoid the battlefront. Their black skin shone with a rich sheen of red dust. They looked exhausted and, at the same time, almost frighteningly strong. Most of the women were bare-breasted. Some of the men were naked, and many of them carried long, thin, leaf-bladed spears. Some carried carbines, others assault rifles. Some of the older women smoked pipes and studied me skeptically.

I wondered what the villagers thought of the Djellabah and of the S.P.L.A. The rebels have never been terribly popular in Eastern Equatoria, but lately, people told me, they had been behaving less arrogantly. "Before, they acted as if they owned the war," one man in Lokutok said. "They *don't* own the war."

The rebel commander for the Lokutok area was a Dinka, but he had married a local woman, and had managed to recruit many local youths as fighters, and these moves had helped improve the S.P.L.A.'s image in the neighborhood. "The people have developed an interest in them," another Lokutok man admitted.

But, as with the Dinkas in Bahr al-Ghazal, the true attitudes of the Lopit could never be represented, I knew, in generic modern political terms. Whether the S.P.L.A. was an ally, a protector, depended on so many things, including individual commanders, even individual fighters, and, always, on who was asking and why. People's political views would be highly contingent on the power arrayed around them.

The power arrayed around them at that moment, the S.P.L.A., was advancing on Torit from three sides. Khartoum, in response to the rebel offensive, was reported to have announced a general call-up, which had meant shutting the country's universities. Now the government was flying thousands of new recruits in to Juba. What did all this fighting portend? Even if the S.P.L.A. took Torit (it ultimately didn't), nothing really new would have occurred—the rebels had occupied it before, and been driven out. It was all just more bloody seesawing. This was part of what people meant when they talked about "the normalization of the war." Another part was the obliviousness of the outside world—its willingness to let an African war burn on for decades. And then there were all the individual accommodations—psychological, social, economic—that people made to survive the fighting. Finally, though, the crucial element of the Sudanese civil war's crazy "normalization" was the insulation of the country's élites, particularly in Khartoum, from the cruel havoc that their feuds wreaked on millions of ordinary people.

Khartoum must be one of the world's least charming old capital cities. Its shabbiness is monumental, its amenities remarkably few, considering that it is home to some five million people. The main streets are filled with choking dust and diesel fumes. The old villas are disintegrating, and the newer buildings are blindingly ugly. Parks are rare and unkempt. Even the banks of the great rivers—the Blue Nile and the White Nile meet in Khartoum—remain, for the most part, muddy and dispiriting. In architecture and public planning, Islamist theory seems to make little provision for the modern commons. The result, in Khartoum, is a city of walls, as residents retreat from the harsh neglect of the streets into private realms—into whatever they can afford in the way of gardens, patios, a shuttered house.

Khartoum is also a city of rumors. Hamas, I heard, was on the fifth floor of my hotel—the Hilton. But I only ever saw members of a Libyan soccer team, lithe in bright-blue sweatpants, get off the elevator at five. German businessmen, looking hot and unhappy, sat in the lobby waiting for government officials. Gulf State sheikhs swept past, too important to wait for anyone, and disappeared into white limousines. Above

"Arm candy."

"For the profits of which we are about to partake, we give thanks. Amen."

all, in the Hilton and around Khartoum and everywhere in government-controlled Sudan, there was the *mukhabarat*, the secret police, watching, listening, bundling the truly unfortunate off to their jails and torture centers, terrifying everybody.

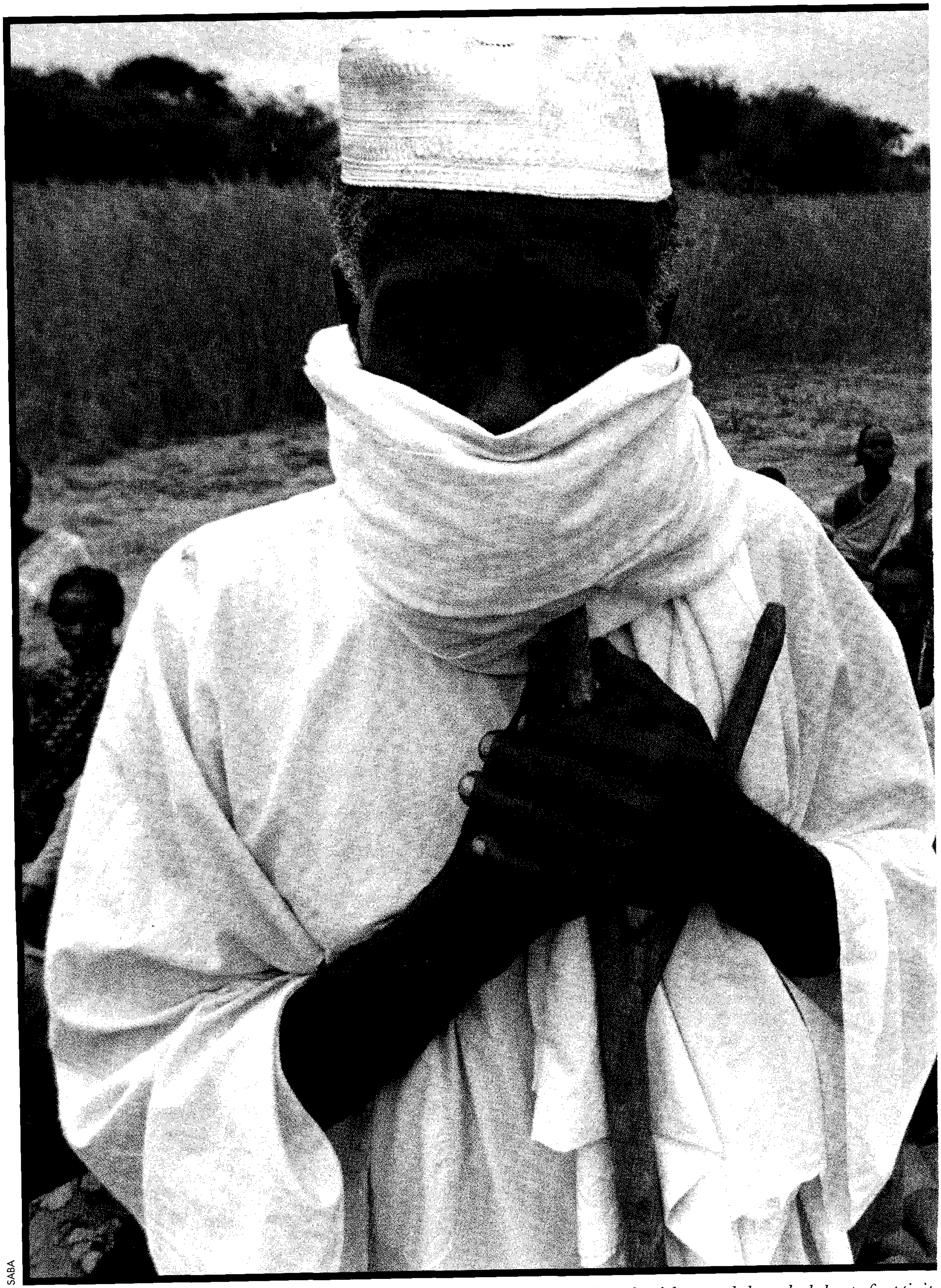
It was stupefying, somehow, after being in the South, to know that Khartoum, this Middle Eastern desert city, parched and puritanical, was the putative capital for the myriad tropical African societies of Equatoria and Dinka country. But even the apparent homogeneity of the "Arab" and "Muslim" North is an illusion. There are no pure Arabs in Sudan—each tribe of Arab nomads who ventured south of Egypt over the past couple of millennia mixed with local people, and the Arabic-speaking riverain Sudanese who today describe themselves as Arabs are usually quite dark-skinned. They are the country's largest ethnic group, but they are not a majority—amounting to only forty per cent of the total population, according to the 1956 census. (Dinkas, at twelve per cent, are the second-largest group.) Although Islam is the state religion, only sixty per cent of Sudanese are Muslims, and though Arabic is the country's official language, only sixty per cent of the people speak it.

Finally, even among the ruling Arab Muslims, there are major religious and political schisms. Most northern Sudanese Muslims belong to Sufi sects founded and led by local holy men. The country's two largest Sufi orders are also its two largest political parties. (These parties, both basically family dynasties, are currently underground, with their exiled leaders in armed alliance with the S.P.L.A.) Sufism is a heterodox Islam, incorporating song and dance (and whirling—Sudan has some dazzling dervishes), prone to mysticism, and tolerant of diversity. Attempts to impose a more orthodox Islam—by Egyptian overlords, for example—have traditionally been resisted.

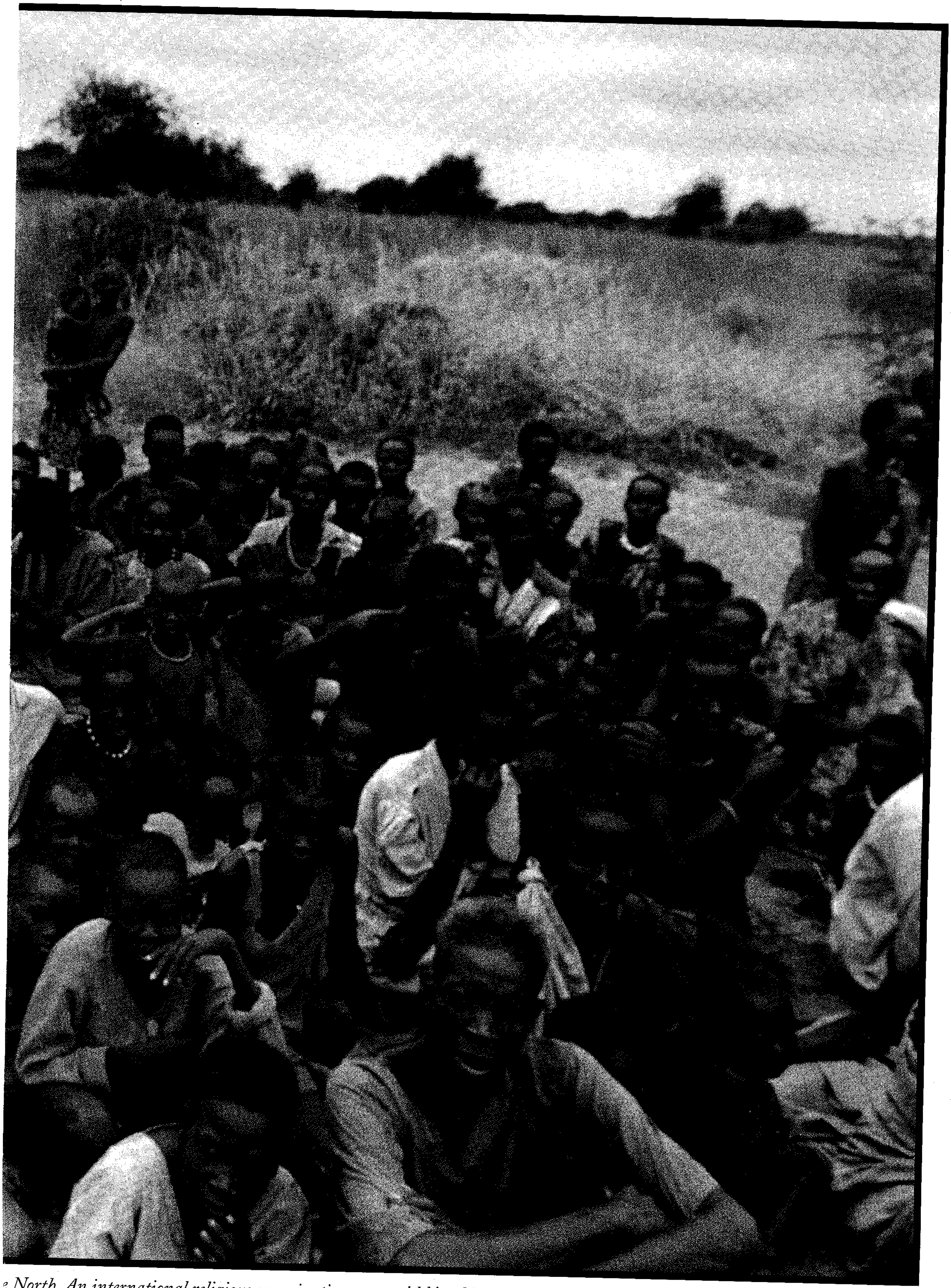
The rise of a radical Islamist movement in Sudan was strictly an élite phenomenon, building slowly among university students and the professional and political class in Khartoum before and after independence, and in direct opposition to an equally small, well-educated Communist movement. The Islamists in Sudan gather much of their political and financial strength from an international group known as the Muslim Brotherhood, which promotes political Islam throughout North Africa and the Middle East. In 1986, during the last election before their 1989 putsch, Sudan's Islamists, known then as the National Islamic Front, received eighteen per cent of the vote. (It was their highest vote total ever but still well behind the votes of both the big Sufi parties.) They have functioned in power as a vanguard party, and it seems safe to say that if a free election were held today they would get even fewer votes.

And so the prospects of the full-scale mobilization for war that was under way while I was in Khartoum in October seemed to me dubious. The universities had effectively been closed. And all over town one saw caravans of white Toyota Hi-Lux pickups honking their way through the streets with clumps of sweating, scared-looking young men in the truck beds, and loudspeakers blaring, "*Allahu Akbar! Ala Jihad! Al Sudan Yanadakum!*" ("God is great! To the holy war! Sudan calls you!") The state radio played military and patriotic music non-stop, and the state television showed young conscripts being sent off to Juba and the front. Sudanese living abroad were urged to donate blood and send money. According to the government, the alleged rebel offensive in Equatoria was actually an invasion of Sudan by Uganda, Eritrea, Rwanda, and Tanzania, and was being directed by the Great Satan, the United States. Fifty thousand new mujahideen were needed. President Bashir assured the troops, in a televised speech, "This battle in Eastern Equatoria will be decisive and final."

Not surprisingly, no one in Khartoum seemed to believe anything that the government said about the situation in Equatoria—not even the government officials themselves. It was simply assumed that all official reports on the counter-offensive would be of glowing victory. (In fact, the counter-offensive *was* successful.) There was strong resistance to the general call-up, especially among university students, but almost nothing appeared in the press about it. And there was great apprehension among parents of young men liable for conscription: everybody I talked to mentioned it, and stories about hospitals in Juba and Khartoum filling up with the newly wounded were


SABA

Savior or slaver? An entrepreneur from Sudan's version of the Underground Railroad, with escaped slaves he led out of captivit



e North. An international religious organization once paid him fifty dollars for each person he freed. Photograph by Cedric Galbe.

circulating furiously. Few people seemed to be buying the idea, much repeated by the war's promoters, that dying for jihad in the South was a glorious way to go, and that all such martyrs received a swift transfer to Paradise.

But there also seemed to be little feeling among ordinary people in Khartoum about the war itself—that is, little real support for the war, and little serious criticism of it. People seemed ready to discuss, and even passionately denounce, the government—assuming that the *mukhabarat* was not around—but the war was of much less interest. The South was a primitive, impoverished waste, according to most of the people who could be bothered to discuss it with me. Unless I was mistaken, a great many northern Sudanese would be just as happy to let the whole place go.

People felt keenly the loss of political freedom under the Islamists. The previous government might have been corrupt and ineffectual, but at least it had been elected. This regime banned political parties, labor unions, and public meetings. It shut newspapers and magazines, and it harassed its opponents without mercy. Thousands had disappeared, and millions had fled the country. The *mukhabarat* had expanded enormously, and a national network of "popular committees" had been created by the region to act, among other things, as spies on ordinary citizens.

A much hotter topic than political oppression, however, was the decline of public services, such as health care and education. Even the price of bread had risen. Government subsidies had been slashed in every area, and it wasn't only the war that was draining the national treasury, for this withering away of the secular state is also fundamental to political Islam. Islamists, like Christian theocrats, don't trust the state, seeing it as inherently corrupt and inefficient. For the redistribution of wealth, they favor *zakat*—tithing. In fact, the "fundamentalist" label often applied to militant Islam can be misleading, because, although there are plenty of Koran literalists among Islamists, most of political Islam is modernizing, seeking to adapt Koranic law to contemporary life and, in the process, to follow political and economic models imported from the West: socialism, Communism, liberal capitalism.

This great social and ideological project requires endless evangelizing, and the Sudanese—even devout Muslims—are clearly tired of being harangued about what is allowed and what is not. The project also requires a focus on youth, on somehow creating a generation more pious and strict than its predecessor. I heard many parents complain about the Islamist indoctrination that their children receive in school, and the strife that it causes at home. Talking to a foreigner, moreover, seems to bring out people's frustration with Sudan's international isolation. "Sudan had many friends," an economist told me bitterly. "Even under Nimeiri, who became a beast, Europe and America liked Sudan. Now there is no one. Just Iraq, Libya—the other pariahs."

According to many opposition activists, the American missile strike on the Al Shifa pharmaceuticals plant in north Khartoum back in August gave the regime a great, undeserved shot in the arm, politically speaking—uniting nearly everyone in patriotic anger. But I also heard people in Khartoum say that there was much quiet cheering around town after the missile strike, even among those who never believed the American evidence of nerve-gas production at Al Shifa. "There are so many of us who just feel that anything that hits at this government—and I mean *anything*—is good," one opposition lawyer told me.

"Transparency," as it is called, is a common Sudanese opposition demand (just as it was in Eastern Europe under Communism), but the decision-making of the Turabi regime mocks this demand at every turn. Nobody outside a secretive inner circle knows what is happening—in oil development, in external relations, in domestic repression, in the economy, in the war. Everyone can see that Sudan's economy has been extensively privatized, yet it has not been liberalized. Nobody knows who actually owns things. Suggestions and complaints from ordinary (Muslim) citizens reach the government through a system known as *shura*, which includes discussions held after evening prayers in the mosques—but what becomes of those suggestions as they rise toward the seat of power is unknown.

As for the Turabi regime's thinking about the civil war, it, too, is largely opaque. Diplomats, academics, and ex-officials agree that there is at least one faction in the ruling circle which is ready, just as many ordinary northerners are, to cut the South loose. The constituency for continuing the war, on the other hand, reportedly includes the military leadership, which naturally does not want to be seen as having lost a war; religious zealots who dream of extending the dominion of Islam throughout the South and beyond; and, of course, politicians and businessmen who, in one way or another, are profiting from the war.

The government's military and political strategies, by contrast, seem perfectly clear: Khartoum will continue to play one southern faction off against the other,

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NEAR HUNSTANTON

These are my own crows in a mechanical flap;
my geese in ragged Vs—more Ws or Ys—
honking abysmally to one another;

my salt marsh smelling of vomit
at low tide, grown with tiny plants
the color of rust; my oak leaves

imitating rain with their eczematic rustle;
my stone-scabbed beach impounded
peu à peu by the sea; my soft low cliffs

crumbling their beach huts to the northeaster;
my big skies you can see coming a mile away;
my jellyfish that you trod on in your sensible shoes.

—MICHAEL HOFMANN

whenever possible. Even if two factions join the government, they can apparently be set to fighting one another. That was the situation at least in Upper Nile Province while I was in Khartoum. There two Nuer militias, both aligned with the government, were slaughtering one another in large numbers. Nothing much was being done to stop the fighting, and I got the impression that there were few things the Turabi regime enjoyed more than watching the South bludgeon the South.

More than two million southerners who have fled the war now live in the North, an estimated one million of them in and around Khartoum. You see them in the city, often in rags, selling cigarettes on street corners, sleeping in the shadows, despite regular police roundups meant to keep them out of sight. You see them in the kitchens of private homes, and working at menial jobs—sweeping, shovelling. The bellhops at my hotel were big, gracious, middle-aged Dinkas with elaborate tribal facial scars. Many live in squatter settlements near town, fighting running battles with the government, which bulldozes their shacks in scenes reminiscent of apartheid South Africa. Most displaced southerners live, however, in a vast constellation of far-flung camps in the desert around Khartoum and Omdurman, which is Khartoum's sister city, across the Nile. The camps are stunningly bleak places: featureless, flat-roofed, mud-brick huts, mile after baking mile, without a bush or a tree or a flower in sight. And yet the saddest thing I saw in the camps, somehow, was the homey touch of a pair of tremendous, lyre-shaped Dinka cattle horns stuck on the mud wall of somebody's *tukul.*

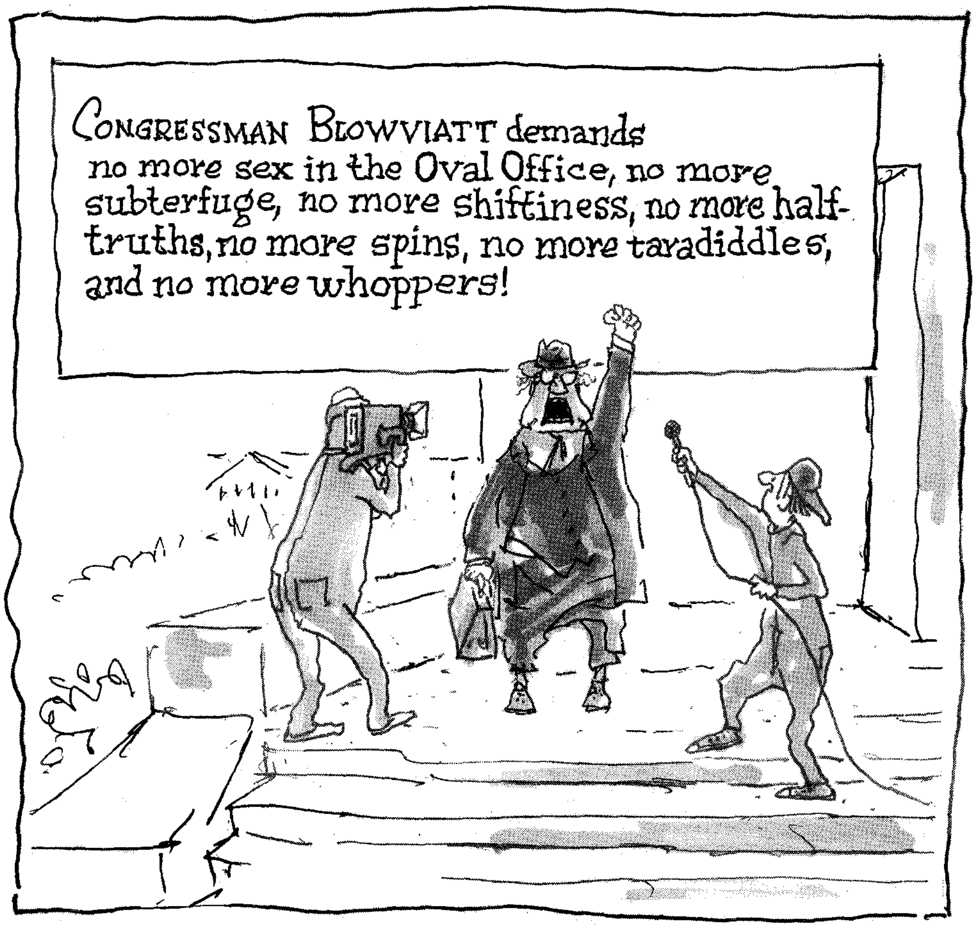
Sudan has more internally displaced persons, as they are called, than any other country in the world, and numerous relief agencies, both local and international, operate in the camps. The local Muslim charities, which are favored by the government, are often accused of trying to Islamize and Arabize the southerners in the camps, who fiercely resent the prohibitions of shariah law, not to mention their own extreme poverty and the long commute to badly paid jobs in town.

"They're a time bomb, the camps," people say. Too many southerners, too little hope, too little to lose—Khartoum one day will be simply overwhelmed, perhaps burned to the ground.

The government, though, doesn't seem notably worried. Its sensitivity to the fact that roughly forty per cent of the capital's metropolitan population is suddenly black doesn't, for instance, seem to have inspired anyone in power to consider changing the name of a main Khartoum thoroughfare, Zubeir Pasher Street, although Zubeir was an infamous nineteenth-century slaver and the street's name has long given offense to southerners. As a rule, I found that Ushari Mahmud, the slavery researcher, was right: the Sudanese Arab belief that blacks belong to a lower order of being is very deep and very widespread.

Mahmud was also right in saying that slavery is, nevertheless, an extraordinarily sensitive subject. The regime recognizes that it is an explosive topic outside Sudan, and each time I asked an official (or a regime supporter) about it I was told not only that there was no credible evidence of slavery's resurgence but that I was obviously trying to pander to African-American readers by even raising the question. And so, while international human-rights groups estimate that there are now tens of thousands of chattel slaves in Sudan—and a growing trade in Sudanese slaves that may reach as far as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States as well—the Sudanese government's reaction is not to investigate such charges aggressively but instead to demand proof. To many observers, this reeks of tacit approval.

But Sudanese Arab attitudes toward slavery really are unusual. Even most political liberals, Mahmud had warned me, "are in total denial." I had tea one evening in Omdurman, in a magnificent old house belonging to one of the leading Sudanese political dynasties. The lady of the house, a professor of mathematics, served me dates from her garden and spoke movingly of her dangerous work with other mothers in organizing protests against conscription. She had a brother, a former government minister, in jail on political charges, she said. But when I mentioned the slavery issue her manner changed. "There is no such thing here," she said sharply. "The Sudanese people


Congressman Blowviatt demands no more sex in the Oval Office, no more subterfuge, no more shiftiness, no more half-truths, no more spins, no more taradiddles, and no more whoppers!

are not that kind of people." When I cautiously mentioned Mahmud and his work, she said that he was "a bad man" and his work was "wrong."

THE government, like most governments, has both rough sides and smooth. President Bashir is not a particularly polished character. Once, on a state visit to Bahrain, he told the press that he would have the leader of the Sudan Medical Association, a distinguished physician, whom he had already thrown in jail, hanged. (He backed away from this threat after an international furor.) The regime's roughest side is, of course, the *mukhabarat*, which is really a myriad of agencies, many with their own detention centers (even the state electricity agency has its own detention center), staffed mainly by semiliterate thugs and torturers. Torture centers are known in Sudan as "ghost houses."

The Turabi regime's smoothest side is Dr. Turabi. He has been a prominent Islamist since his university days, in the early nineteen-fifties. He holds advanced law degrees from the Sorbonne and the University of London, and in the early sixties he was the dean of Khartoum University's law school. He was jailed for seven years during the Nimeiri dictatorship, then released and later made Attorney General. He was a prime mover in Nimeiri's imposition of shariah law, and he was still a close Presidential adviser in early 1985, when Nimeiri disgusted much of the Muslim world by executing Mahmoud Muhammad Taha, a distinguished liberal scholar of Islam, who was then in his seventies. Indeed, Turabi's path to power is said to be littered with a large number of bodies. But knowing much about this Machiavellian, not to say bloodstained, curriculum vitae only leaves a visitor to Turabi's office unprepared for the lissome, laughing old intellectual who presides there.

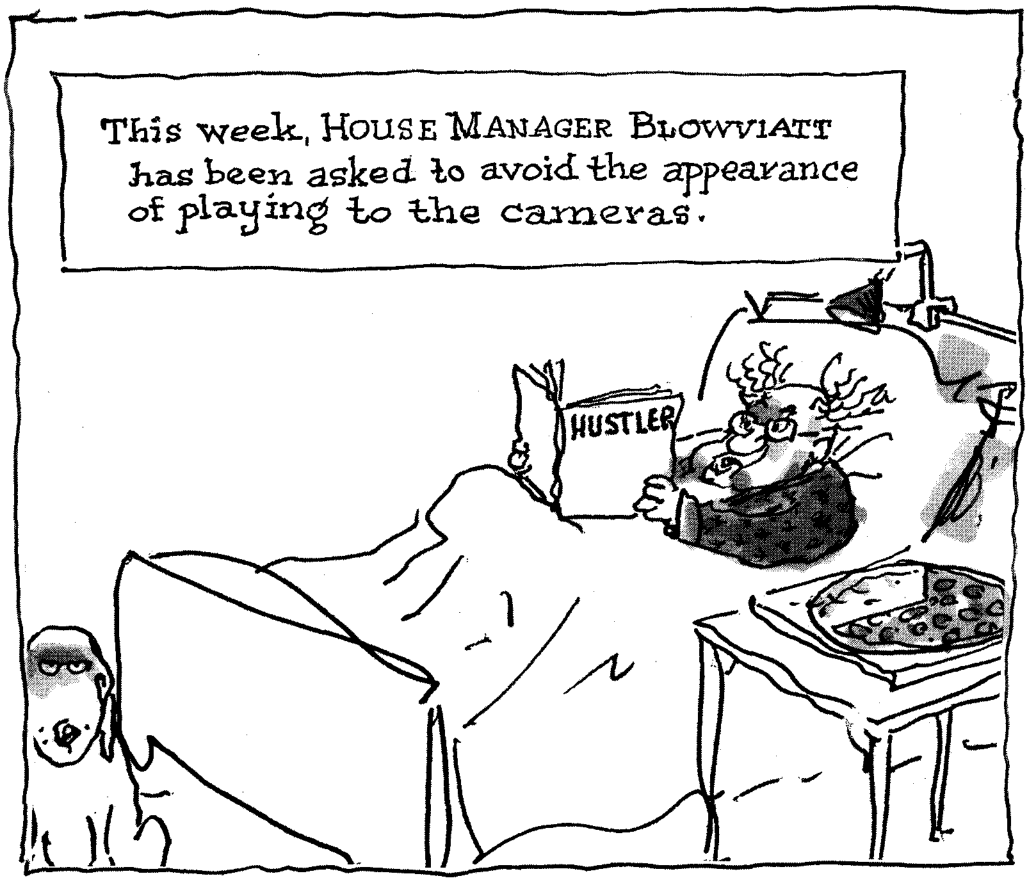
"We are going for freedom, completely," he told me. He waved his hands in a loose, fluttering circle and giggled. Dark-skinned, white-bearded, and wearing white robes, a turban, and black-framed glasses, Sudan's maximum leader is—with his little buck-toothed, Bugs Bunny laugh—an improbable figure. He is also given to making improbable arguments. At one point, he was trying to convince me not just that his poor, hungry, war-torn backwater "is becoming a very important country" but that his terrifying police state "is a free country," and added, "Monopoly is only for God." He mixes economic libertarianism with high-flown disquisitions on art, science, and religion. ("An artist is submitting to God. A scientist is doing the same.") The over-all impression is of a politician so hardheaded, so shrewd in his assessments of enemies and allies, and ultimately so successful in his machinations that he can afford to be playful, obscure, even silly. I found his single most unnerving gesture to be an upward-glancing, inward swoon of contemplation followed by a girlish sigh.

I asked Turabi about the war. He said that John Garang was jealous of the former rebels who had joined the government, which struck me as unlikely. To explain the situation in the South to me, Turabi thought to use an American analogy—the Civil War. "The Confederacy no longer exists," he said. "Most of the niggers of yesteryear, they are in Chicago now. It is just the same here, with millions of southerners having come to the North. With better roads, which we plan to build, virtually all of them will come North. They are becoming conscious of the fact that there is such a thing as a job, et cetera. They will no longer want to sit under a tree just waiting for the fruit to fall."

The idea that the people of Sudan's South—herders and farmers with the most physically demanding lives imaginable, people as deeply wedded to their lands as any set of tribes on earth—are lazy and are looking forward to moving north en masse to work for the hated Djellabah struck me as so deeply foolish that it was almost funny. Nobody laughed, though. And Turabi nattered on.

The wind catches
Congressman Blowviatt's jerkin.

NOT only is Sudan's civil war, as presently arrayed, unwinnable by either side but peace itself seems to lack any significant constituency. Suffering, war-weary civilians have little leverage. None


This week, HOUSE MANAGER BLOWVIATT has been asked to avoid the appearance of playing to the cameras.
HUSTLER

of Sudan's neighbors are being seriously threatened by the war. In fact, few, if any, of their governments, no matter how much they fear and loathe Khartoum, and no matter what they say publicly in support of the S.P.L.A., want to see the South win its independence, for all of them have their own restive minorities, and secession is thus a horrifying idea.

Egypt, the regional powerhouse, detests the Turabi regime. (Egypt's government does, anyway. The country's many Islamists tend to feel differently.) In August, Cairo hosted a meeting of the leadership council of John Garang's National Democratic Alliance, and in September President Mubarak announced, against most available evidence, that the American attack on the Al Shifa pharmaceuticals plant in Khartoum had been justified. And yet even the Egyptian government has no interest in seeing southern Sudan gain its independence.

Egypt's overriding strategic concern is the Nile, without whose waters it cannot survive. The last thing Cairo wants to see is a weak new southern state, possibly under the influence of Israel, controlling most of the upper White Nile. This is never publicly stated, but it is widely understood. Indeed, it is often given as the reason that Garang doesn't dare announce that the S.P.L.A.'s real goal is independence for the South: Egyptian opposition would doom his movement. Of course, the viability of an independent southern state is another question. Landlocked, with virtually no infrastructure, and already filthy with warlords, it would be the world's poorest country—completely destitute, even by African standards, and totally dependent on outside investment for any development. If there is any sunnier, more realistic prospect for an independent South, I haven't heard about it.

American policy toward Sudan since the end of the Cold War—and since the rise of the Turabi regime—has been a combination of open hostility, stemming mainly from the regime's involvement with Iraq and from its hospitality toward a remarkable number of terrorist groups; of humanitarian engagement, primarily through Operation Lifeline Sudan; and of tepid political support for the rebel alliance. Like Sudan's neighbors, who aid the S.P.L.A. and would seemingly like to see the regime in Khartoum fall, Washington does not appear to have any actual alternative government in mind. The fact is that Sudan's strategic significance to the United States today is negligible, with the Horn of Africa no longer a cockpit of American-Soviet competition. Egypt is our key regional ally; Sudan is a sideshow.

Given the scale of Sudan's suffering, the ongoing catastrophe of its civil war, and the millions of lives already lost in the South, the geopolitics raise an extremely disturbing possibility. While the outside world's obliviousness of Sudan's plight is real, it is hardly complete. There is, after all, Operation Lifeline Sudan, now the largest air-relief operation since the Berlin airlift, fifty years ago. O.L.S. is expensive, having so far cost its sponsors more than two billion dollars. For the price of one week's air relief, it is sometimes said, all the war-destroyed bridges and roads in the South could be repaired. Such reconstruction would, of course, require peace. The hard question is why the international community—the Western powers, really, led by the United States—is willing to invest so heavily in humanitarian relief and, at the same time, to invest almost nothing in the diplomatic effort that might compel the warring parties to make peace. The awful possibility is that the Sudanese status quo, an indecisive, low-intensity conflict that weakens an unfriendly regime and suits our key regional ally, Cairo, also suits our policymakers.

And so I heard out Martin Mawiens Dut, the village magistrate in northern Bahr al-Ghazal who had recently lost his wife, his daughter, and his son in the war, as he explained his hopes for an American-sponsored, all-parties peace conference for Sudan. "Only the Americans can do it," he had proclaimed. "We are all counting on them!" And I did not tell him what I had heard one analyst say—that the West, for market reasons, would probably become interested in Sudan's oil reserves in about thirty years, and that Sudan should therefore expect its civil war to last until then. ♦

FICTION

HIS ŒUVRE

Old lovers watched him from the darkness.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Henry Bech, the aging American author, found that women he had slept with decades ago were showing up at his public lectures. He could sense them in the auditorium even when it was dark. Clarissa Tompkins, for instance, slipped in late at a reading in New Jersey, in an old suburban movie theatre converted to cultural uses, after the houselights were dimmed and he had already launched himself into one of the prose poems from his miscellany "When the Saints" (1958), evoking an East Village junk shop. Lifting his head to project the phrase "a patina of obscure former usage annealing a contemporary application of very present dust," savoring the dentals in that clinching duet of words, he saw her silhouette against the dull glow cast by the old-fashionedly ornate sign to the movie house's ladies' room. Clarissa glided out of the island of amber light into the black rows at the back, but there had been no mistaking the upswept taffy-colored hairdo that enlarged her already sizable head, a head poignantly balanced on her petite, breastless frame. After lovemaking in the Tompkinses' splendid Fifth Avenue apartment, with its view across to the Dakota, they would have a naked picnic on the deep-napped Oriental at the center of the living room, a little further burst of taffy color innocently exposed as she sat cross-legged, devouring her half of a turkey sandwich the cook had made before leaving for the afternoon. Amidst the opulence of her apartment Clarissa was thrifty—one sandwich cut in two, one teabag serving two cups. Her face beneath all that bouffant hair looked tiny, and as she scrunched it into her half-sandwich all but disappeared—the little straight nose, the myopic green eyes usually straining to see but now vaguely swimming in her orgasm's aftermath. At each bite, her plump upper lip would leave a pink blur at the rim of soft white bread. Her lipstick was messy and indelible; he usually needed a full cleanup, not with just a washrag but with paper towels dabbed in vodka, before he dared the elevator, the doorman, the street.

What had led her to show up in New Jersey, at this community college wedged in the suburban wastes north of Newark? How had she known of his reading? He lost his place, wondering, and a silence stretched above the faces listening in the shadows before he found his spot on the page and went on, "One warily inspects, bending forward, a mostly wooden apple-corer, a piece of carved intricacy suggesting a torturer's device out of Borges or Kafka, that had somehow, through a chain of canny and, one hopes, profitable transactions made its way from an underheated Vermont attic to this stuffy, jumbled trading post in nether Gotham." He disliked the sentence, more wordy than he had ever noticed before.

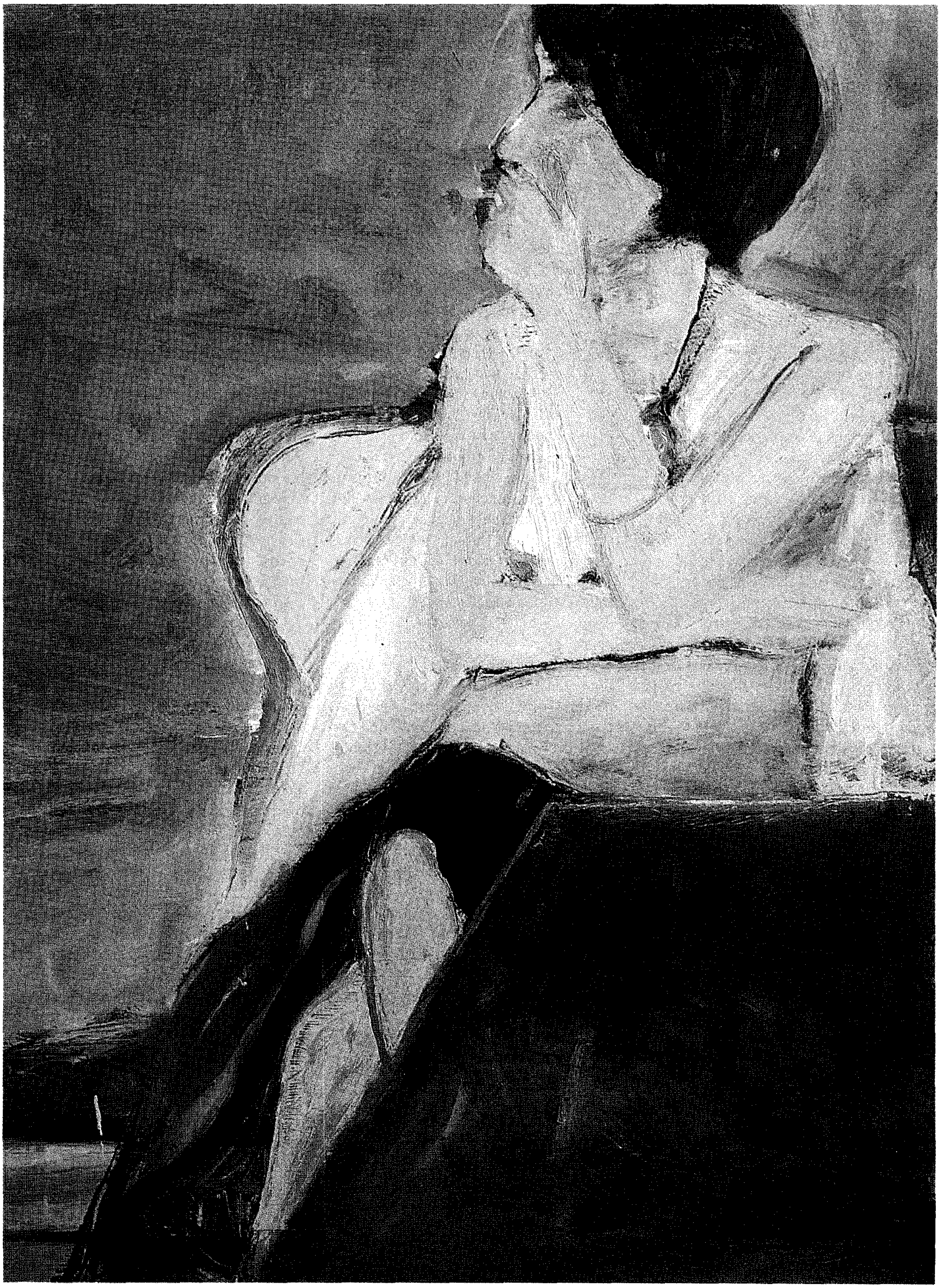
Mr. Tompkins had been a patron—the chief patron, indeed—of an avant-garde publication with the austere name of *Displeasure*, to which Bech had been a faithful contributor. Clarissa had seen in him, perhaps, a noble savage—a woolly-haired, thick-bodied bohemian beyond all bourgeois scruples. The fifties had been a boom time for noble savages, more or less modelled on Henry Miller, before the sixties brought in such a slew of them that they became a political mob. But Bech had a tender regard, if not for wealth as a concept, for the artifacts it could purchase—for Tompkins's lush carpets, for his gilt-brushed Oriental prints, for his kitchen gleaming with Swiss fixtures and green marble countertops, for his king-size bed and its sheets of Sea Island cotton. The couple was childless; these possessions were their helpless children. Each tryst in the luxurious duplex—the maid and the cook tactfully dismissed by the mistress but who knows with what dark suspicions—had made Bech morally queasy. Tompkins patronizes art, the literary artist pays him back by screwing his wife.

Clarissa, to do her credit, felt that the situation was somehow sensitive for her lover. She pressed her physical claims as if upon an invalid, with the solicitous yet unretreating voice of a hospital visitor, coaxing him into vigor; she led him as if he had been a teen-ager into certain byways of gratification which left her lipstick stains passed back and forth between their bodies like the ricochet marks in a squash court. The route to her orgasms could be tortuous. A yoga adept, she liked being bent backward over a silk-cushioned stool so that her head rested on the floor a foot below her hips, her green eyes groping for his face and the rug's swirling pattern showing through her teased, expanded hair. She did not mind, she led him to slowly understand, certain Hindu variations on the standard positions, and with wordless hints drew his masculine force out of its shell of shyness. His very reserve and hesitation enabled her, it seemed, to break some seal on her own inhibitions.

Still, she could not hold him. His sense of himself as a pollutant of Arnold Tompkins's posh apartment, its delicate silks and innocent velvets, led him to write Clarissa a letter of withdrawal, pleading, not falsely, a desire to leave her ensconced among treasures whose beauty and worth, though negligently dismissable by her, were not so by him. In short, he did not want by any consequence of scandal to become responsible for a rich woman's upkeep, ardent though she had shown herself to be.

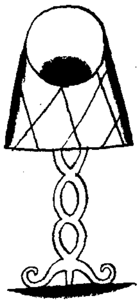
As he read at the tippy, ill-lit lectern, plowing on with these forty-year-old prose poems that suddenly seemed fatally mannered as well as badly dated, and then launching himself into the well-worn anthology piece, the truck-stop brawl in his road novel, "Travel Light" (1955), he scanned the audience between sentences, looking for a stray glimmer from the high airy crown of her hair. She

RICHARD DIEBENKORN, "GIRL SMOKING" (1963)/PRIVATE COLLECTION.



had moved in the darkness from her initial perch in the back row, near the glowing amber sign that was, he squintingly perceived, a kind of magic lantern, a metal box cut, in one of the elegancies common in the old movie palaces, to display against its light bulb the silhouette of an eighteenth-century pompadoured woman at her toilet, above the cutout script spelling "Ladies."

And when the houselights came up, for the apple-corer torture of the question-and-answer period, Clarissa was quite gone, sunk forever in the bland smiling sea of middle-aged—more than middle-aged, elderly—female book lovers and author groupies. How mischievous of her to show up so magically and then vanish! Had it been a reprimand for his disappearance from her life, to which he had been granted such unstinting entry? They had not met again, even at an office party, for Tompkins had shortly thereafter withdrawn his patronage from *Displeasure*, and the magazine had limped along awhile and then collapsed.



At the West Side Y—so much cozier a venue than the more heavily publicized East Side forum at Ninety-second Street—Bech sought for a friendly face in the audience upon which to pin his reading. He was trying, for far from the first time, to pump life into that scene from his novel "Think Big" (1979) wherein Olive, having discovered herself at last to be a lesbian, confesses her previous amours while lying in the arms of Tad Greenbaum's discarded mistress, Thelma, in the orange sunset light that enters the room horizontally, like bars of music, from beyond the Palisades. This passage, with its shuffling back and forth between two love-drugged female voices, was a precarious one to animate, and needed the encouragement of a willing smile from some female auditor. Tonight the smile, so radiant—luscious, even, in its wide white face—did not have to be sought out; rather, it seemed to have sought him out. As he read aloud, murmuring into the rustling, sometimes woofing, microphone, he was nagged by the notion that he had known this encouraging face before. The smile, outlined in a lipstick so dark it appeared black in the auditorium half-light, had a sweet, forgiving tuck on one side that implied former acquaintance, an insight into him that bypassed his theatrical attempt to breathe life into the drowsy confidences of two imaginary women. The only thing real in what he was reading was the room itself, an exact transcription of the Riverside Drive apartment he had lived in for years, before his ill-fated marriage to Bea Latchett, Norma Latchett's relatively sweet-tempered sister.

Wait, he thought, even as he kept his voice working, there was a cranny, a niche in the era of his life dominated by the Latchett sisters, where this disembodied black-lipped smile fit. Burgundy mouth, long-lashed purple-irised eyes, straight black hair falling to glossy wide shoulders, a black triangle centered between wide white hips. A woman encountered at infrequent intervals, a woman a touch too fleshy and dogmatic for him, but whose amazing waxen pallor, lighting up rooms otherwise dim, drew him back, now and again, as he glancingly, skittishly moved through downtown literary circles in those slovenly sixties. Gretchen. Gretchen Folz, the would-be poet. Her pathetic cubbyhole on Bleecker Street, its narrow bed snug against a parsley green wall, access to its other side limited by tilting stacks of New Directions and Grove Press paperbacks. The bed had an Amish bedspread whose pattern of triangular patches reminded him of Stars of David, and an iron head whose vertical pipes dug grooves into his back when Gretchen, in the woman-couchant position, straddled him and teased his mouth with her livid nipples.

The thrill of recovered memory made his voice boom inappropriately as he read Olive's tender summing up to Thelma: "It was all, like, you know, Snow White's forest on the path to you." Decades ago, he remembered, he had vacillated between "path" and "way" and had rejected "way" as a word with too many meanings and too evocative of Proust, but now "way" seemed the more natural expression, though less incidentally evocative of entangling sexual grapples, with leering male faces on the tree trunks.

Gretchen's poems had wispily trailed down the page, making elliptical jumps that he had taken to be faithful to a woman's erratic inner connections. Her orgasms, come to think of it, did not come easily either. She had been flustered at first by Bech's rather burly determination to work out the problem with her. "Slam, bam, thank you ma'am is really often the most satisfying," she told him.

"What a cop-out," he said. "Think what an exploitative heel that makes me."

"But what . . . ? I mean how . . . ?"

How lovely, how adorably alight her wide satiny face had been in its girlish confusion, its prefeminist reluctance to think of her genitals in detail. He had piqued her interest, and they clambered together over the pillared copies of Pound and Burroughs, Céline and Genet, Anaïs Nin and Djuna Barnes, which spilled like a row of dominoes, reaching the center of the tiny room.

Why had his contacts with Gretchen been so scattered, as willing and, gradually, responsive as she had been? Her writing, perhaps, had offended him: his erotic drive generally steered clear of literary women, who might compete or try to touch the aloof, unspeakable heart of his raison d'être. Also, she was large, not lithe and little as he liked women; he distrusted the luxury of her spilling flesh, the creamy slowness of her laboring, amid the swelling smells of brine and estrus, toward sexual release. If she had lost a little weight, if there had been a little less flesh to move, she might have found the way—the path—easier. His ministrations felt awkwardly close to those of a doctor rather than those of a lover, with a therapeutic focus that diluted his own excitement. Also, descending into the cramped quarters and futile literary ambitions of Bleecker Street struck him—already faintly famous, with all four of his titles, up to 1963, having achieved mention in the *Times Book Review's* Christmas list of Notable Books—as slumming. And she was Jewish, which wasn't what he needed at the time. He felt Jewish enough for two. He had something she powerfully needed, his sexual patience, and this shameless need disgusted, it could have been, his fastidious side. She was never indignant for long when he coasted back into her orbit.

Tonight, too, after he had doggedly, absent-mindedly completed his reading, and taken halfhearted swings at a few of the puffball questions the audience tossed up, Gretchen met him with no shadow of resentment for his erratic wooing and unexplained fading away but instead with a matured form of her old wistful glee, her girlish hope of eventual fulfillment. Her kiss of greeting claimed him with a new authority; her bohemian diffidence was gone. "Henry, I'd like you to meet my husband," she said.

He was a substantial red-faced fellow, sixty or so, dignified but not unfriendly, wearing a pin-striped suit that was more used to board meetings than prose readings. "Good stuff," he said gamely, guessing why he had been brought here.

"Henry, how you still do go on," Gretchen said. "A lesbian is the last thing you want to be."

"I don't know. Maybe I'm still evolving," he said, regretting that her peck to one side of his mouth had been so brief, so dry. She looked fulfilled. Her wide-hipped weight, next to the bulk of her spouse, was no problem, and she had had her hair cut raggedly short and tinged with a metallic cinnabar red, giving her a rather ravishing futuristic look.

"What ever happened to your poems?" he asked. He never knew quite what to say to these women who showed up.

"Privately printed," she answered, the sharp dark corners of her mouth tucking into her creamy cheeks with the only hint of revenge her amiable nature would allow itself. "Beautifully printed. Bob loves them."

"Bob," Bech said, prolonging the vowel as if to taste her once again, "is obviously a discerning critic. He likes both our stuff. Stuffs."

YOU don't expect much to happen in Indianapolis, once you've seen the Hoosier Dome and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument. Their pairing reminded Bech of the closer coupling, in London, of the Royal Albert Hall—round and capacious and rosy—and the phallic spike of the Albert Memorial, across Kensington Road. Perhaps the world can be deconstructed into these two basic shapes, everywhere seeking one another. Just before his reading at the Marion County Public Library, while he was standing idle and momentarily unchaperoned on one side of the steps to the stage, a crisp, short, pleasant-looking woman in a magenta tweed suit came up to him starry-eyed.

He had encountered starry eyes before, in the visages of women who had read too much into one of his novels, casting themselves as heroine at the expense of his sketchy script, but this woman's approach was not that of a fan. "Henry Bech," she said, in the firm flat accent of the great American inland, "I am Alice Oglethorpe. You may not remember, but we once travelled from New

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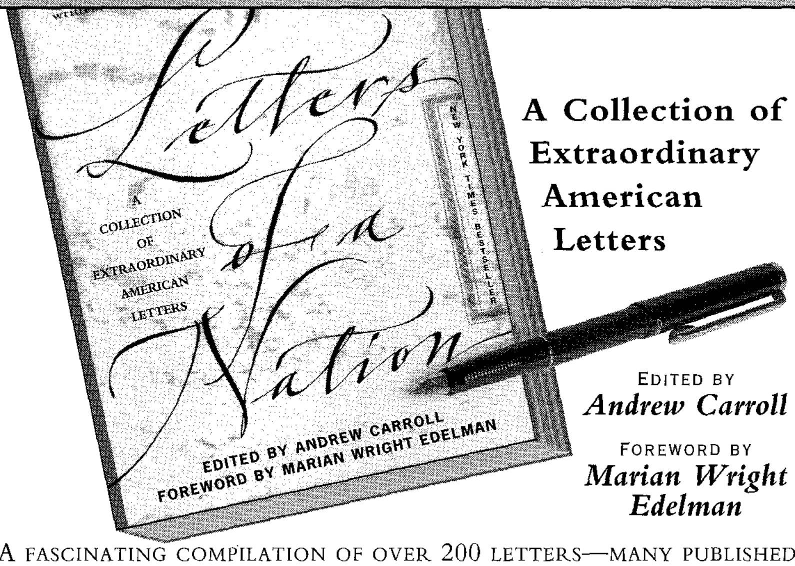
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York to Los Angeles on the same train."

Her handshake was like her voice, firm, and neither cold nor warm, but he detected a slight tremble. Then, her identity dawning, his heart surged forward in his chest and he, the professional spielmeister, felt his mouth open and nothing come out. Her blue eyes, with their uncanny silvery backing, clung to his attentively while his brain groped. He would not have recognized her at all. She seemed too young to be Alice. Though his blood had bounded toward her, he was ashamed to have become, since they had last been together, an old man. "Oh my God," he brought out at last. "You. Of course I remember. The Twentieth Century Limited."

"Just as far as Chicago," she corrected him. "After that, it was the Santa Fe Super Chief."

His left hand, holding the book that he was to read from tonight, clumsily tried to caress the hand, the precious piece of her, that he was holding in his right. "How are you? Where are you? What happened next?"

Bech's confusion gratified her, and calmed her. She withdrew her hand, with its tremble. Her eyes did not leave his, but her mouth, lifted apprehensively, settled into a smile. She had been recognized. "I'm here," she answered. "Or rather, in Bloomington. I'm well. I got over it."

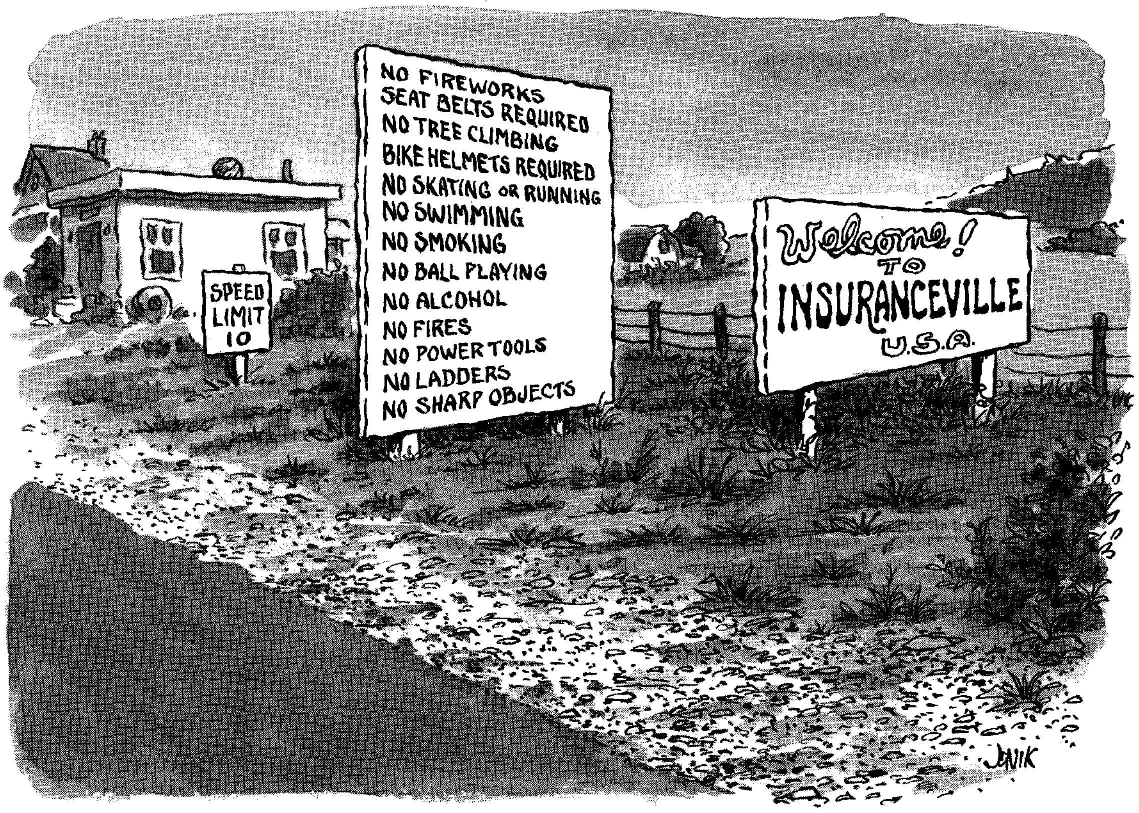
She had oddly little aged, just broadened a bit. Her hair was the same light-brunette shade, too nondescript to be a tint, and her wool suit was scarcely saved by its bold magenta from verging on dowdy. Her disguise as an ordinary, law-abiding woman was intact.

Her husband, he remembered, had been some sort of financial analyst, a middle-level money man. She had been travelling to L.A. to join him at the end of a weeklong conference sponsored by the Southern California defense industry. Oh, she could have gone with him and stayed in the hotel, but what would she have done all day—take bus tours to the homes of the stars? Her silvery eyes and dry intonation told Bech that she considered herself, at some level, more of a star than they. At least she was a proximate presence, talking only to him. She had always wanted to travel across the country, she told him, and hated to fly, though she could do it, with a couple of stiff drinks inside her. Bech was going to the far coast on what he knew would be a futile exploration of the cinematic possibilities of his first, somewhat sensational novel, "Travel Light." He, too, would rather ride the rails than entrust his body to the bumpy, propeller-driven flights of the late fifties, before the triumph of the big jets. The dashing transcontinental trains were on the way out, and by taking one Alice and he revealed a kindred romantic streak. All this came out in their first conversation, they having been seated together, two singles, in the crowded dining car.

The shiver of their cutlery on the vibrating tablecloth. The reassuring, fairy-tale solidity of the heavy-bottomed cups and coffee pots, bearing New York Central's logo. The theatrically deferential black waiters in a world where happy black servitude was also on the way out. Bech sensed as soon as she was ushered to his tingling table that she would sleep with him. There was that pale light in her eyes, a slightly loud shimmer in her teal-blue gabardine suit, an eager electricity in the way she moved and, with a little wine in her, talked. Women who were talkative, sexual lore reported and his limited experience tended to verify, "put out" in other respects. He and she were as alone on that speeding train, clicking north beside the Hudson, as on a desert island.

His chaperone, the head librarian of Indianapolis, reclaimed him; it was time to go onstage and earn his fee. Alice said, warmly but formally, that it had been good to see him after all these years.

"You look wonderful—wonderful!" was all he could bring out. She turned away, he turned away. How stupid he had been! No blushing schoolboy could have been more tongue-tied. That clumsy scraping caress he had tried to deliver with a book in his hand. His failure to ask any searching questions. His body felt like a struck gong, swollen by its reverberations. To think that she was near, that she had come to find him! As he dizzily plowed through his reading, the questions he should have asked her flocked to his mind. Where did she live, exactly? Was she happy? Would she run away with him now, now that her wifely and motherly



duties were done? There had been small children, he remembered, whom she had left with her husband's parents in the Bronx. But she was not a New Yorker, her journey had begun upstate, and that made her even more of a gift from beyond. Beyond all reason. Beyond all expectations. Under the lectern light his hands looked strange and withered, but for all that rather beautiful. Articulated, hairy masses. He had been beautiful.

She did not sleep with him the first night. She stood up after coffee and firmly said good night. In those days the Pullman sleepers with green-curtained upper and lower berths had become antiques; the sleeper cars on the Twentieth Century Limited were divided into roomettes, each measuring seven feet by three. Bech scarcely slept, knowing that she was but a few steps away, in another roomette. Perhaps like him she was writhing between the too-tight sheets and flipping the pillow over to its cool side in the vain hope that blessed oblivion would rise from it, mixed with the tireless thud of the rail joints. Toward dawn there was a prolonged bright ruckus that must have been Buffalo.

THEY found each other at breakfast in the dining car as it swayed and chimed through Ohio. "How did you sleep?" he asked.

"Terribly."

"Maybe we were lonely."

"I never sleep well on trains, thanks," she said. Her sleepless pallor and the unforgiving morning sunlight as it bounced up from the glittering stubble of the cornfields brought out a slight roughness, a constellation of tiny nicks as if from an adolescent storm of acne, below her cheekbones. The harsh slant sunlight betrayed her and then was slapped down by intervening poles, brick towers, railside warehouses. Makeup didn't quite cover this touching flaw. He had forgotten it, he had forgotten to look for it in the few amazing moments when she had appeared again before him. She had once asked him if he would ever forget her.

He turned the slightly abrasive page under the lectern light. He had chosen—God knows why, perhaps out of some sense he had of Indianapolis as a pious place—that passage from "Brother Pig" (1957) where the Trappist monks, loosely based on what he had read of Thomas Merton, silently plot, with hand signals and written slips, to smuggle in a Jewish reporter from a New York tabloid—a "scandal sheet" one would call it now—to expose the abbot's tyranny and pederasty. How did he, Henry Bech, get caught in this embarrassing tangle of far-fetched, decadent motifs when the most marvellous lay of his life was out there among the shadowy, offended heads of devout Quaylites and Butler University evangels?

Alice and he had breakfasted together, and sat dozily with books in the club car. Other travellers spoke to them, and they were inveigled into a game of bridge, of which he scarcely knew the rules, squinting at his cards beside the sun-slapped windows, trying to decipher her bids, all the time feeling her with him in a dream world of insomniac yearning and wordless anticipation of the night. When, in the middle of the afternoon, they pulled into Chicago, for a half-hour shuffle of cars and locomotives, Bech dashed out of the great barrel-vaulted station to buy a three-pack of Trojans at a Rexall's, on Jackson Boulevard. His heart thrummed as if to break his ribs. The sly, blond-mustached clerk tried to talk him into an entire tin of fifty instead of the tinfoiled three—"You'll use 'em," he promised, on no more basis than Bech's flushed, panting face—and with spiteful slowness, the economy size declined, counted out Bech's change. Suppose the train pulled out without him?

Now, in Indianapolis, he was compelled to make his way through pages he had felt obliged, decades ago, to write, in order to give his scabrous, irreligious journalist a family background and a professional history satiric of postwar New York literary circles. Had ever a selection been more ill-chosen, more maddeningly prolonged? A few nervous titters in the audience tried to rise to the cultural occasion. Did he hear Alice's laugh? She had laughed telling him once, "You're safe."

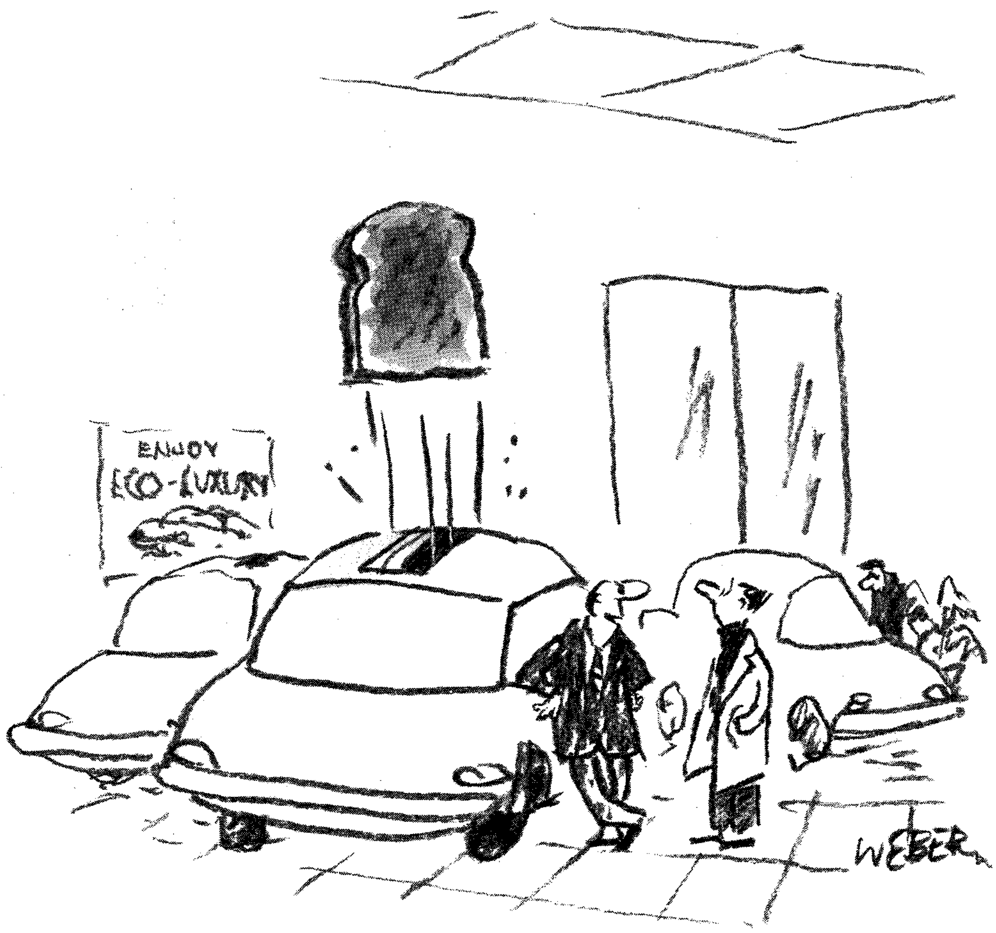
At dinner, as the train hurtled into the darkness of flat farmland where a few distant houses pricked the night, she rose unsteadily from her coffee, smoothing a few crumbs from her lap, and said, "I must lie down. I feel sick."

"Oh my God, why?"

His new friend smiled. "The constant motion. The long day. Not you. I like you." She hesitated, fighting a bit for balance as the Super Chief slammed over a patch of rocky roadbed. She bent toward him over the chattering silverware and said, softly but matter-of-factly, "Give me an hour. I must rest a little. Roomette 16. Knock twice."

" 'Klein found himself fascinated by the Trappists,' " he heard himself reading. " 'Like Hasidim, they seemed to possess an archaic secret of joy, coded in their grotesque hairdos. The monks' tonsures framed a pink circle of scalp, and their faces had a childish sheen polished to a bright daze by the cruel hours of their devotions and their dawn rising to the duties of farmers.' " Too many dentals, Bech thought. And then his captive tongue was launched into a long and dated description of Klein's brother, a labor organizer when such men still wielded a power that could bring a country to a halt.

After an hour of staring at the flat, loam-black land—were they still in Illinois?—he had had the porter make up his roomette, No. 5, and in pajamas and pin-striped cotton robe ventured out into the carpeted aisle, alone with its retreating perspective. He feared she would be asleep, but her answer to his two knocks was quick. Her hair pulled back, her face clean of makeup—his impression was of a nun or a prisoner—she was kneeling in a nightgown on the bed; there was nowhere else in the tiny cell to be. So that twenty-two roomettes could be fitted into the length of a car, they were dovetailed, with two steps' difference in height between each adjacent pair; the bed of the slightly lower chamber slid in daytime under the floor of the raised room beside it, and the feet of its occupants extended under an overhang which somewhat inhibited their movements. But Alice was small and flexible and he not tall, and at times they seemed to stretch their allotted space to the size of a ballroom. Between times they raised the shade, gingerly, as if watchdogs of Midwestern puritanism might be posed in the black air streaming outside. The vast sleeping landscape would be shattered by a rapid garble of silhouetted architecture, or by lowered crossing gates where headlights patiently burned, or a local station platform like a suspensefully empty stage set, the small towns with their neon signs and straight strings of street lamps wheeling and falling away to reveal the main visual drama, the abysmal darkness of



"And they say electric cars aren't practical."

farmland. Low streaks of cloud hung in a faint phosphorescence.

They must be in Missouri now, if not Kansas. Her pliant nakedness, unified to his senses of touch and smell, flickered in curved short circuits when the train roared past lights defending a water tower or a set of grain silos. When the train hissed and slid to a stop, at a platform holding only a bare baggage wagon and a loudly reuniting family, he raised the stiff green shade a few inches so he could ponder her supine beauty as a continuous, calm, exultant entity, with rises and swales and dulcet shadowed corners. The curious silvery light of her eyes now lived all along her skin. In the small space carved from the surrounding, upholding clatter and mutter of the rushing train, she was a giantess who met him, his sensation was, wherever he thrusted, with an embracing cavity. She did it all, and had to keep suppressing moans that would disturb the unknown fellow-passengers presumably sleeping an arm's length away. "Will you forget me?" she at one point whispered. There were fits of dozing amid a constant rejoining. The sly druggist had been right; Bech had underbought. The couple's closet of satisfied desire became nicely rank with a smell that was neither him nor her. "We're all mixed up together," she whispered, after she had swallowed and caught her breath. The heartland they endlessly poured through seemed no vaster than territories laid open within them. "You're perfect," she sighed toward morning, sadly, like a distant train whistle, in his ear. She was not quite perfect, he had observed by the hard morning light in the dining car. In the dark he touched her cheeks, that had looked abraded, with tiny nicks. A miracle. They were perfectly smooth. "So are you," he told her. It was the truth.

As he read aloud, he kept remembering that it was his unhappy sister-in-law's boss, a self-important thug in a double-breasted camel-hair topcoat, who had reluctantly filled in the young author with details of how labor unions operated. At the time, Bech thought he could, in the long future before him, assemble all America as a mosaic of such research. Now these details, as they passed through the microphone into the air, seemed worked-up and tinny, and his antihero Klein's cynical take on the Trappists—misfits, defectives, cop-outs—adolescently callous. With relief he at last ended the reading, but there were still the questions from the audience to face. Do you use a word processor and, if so, what kind? What authors influenced you in your youth? How did you like the movie of "Travel Light," starring Sal Mineo? What—his least favorite question—is your personal favorite of your books? The auditorium lights had been turned up, so he could see the waving hands, the eager, respectful, aggressive faces. He scanned them for Alice, and failed to spot her, but the crowd was large, with restless, ill-lit edges over by the walls, and there was nothing about her, not even the magenta suit, to keep her from blending in.

Dawn had brought them into gauntly irrigated farmland yielding, mile by mile, to desert. He had scuttled out of her roomette like a gopher, and snatched a few hours of sleep in his own. The Pullman car had an ecology they were fitting into. The other passengers accepted them, by now, as a couple. They were invited again to play bridge—Bech timidly failed to bid a small slam though Alice had given clear signals that her hand was loaded—and a beefy pair of middle-aged Texans sat down at their table for dinner, not appearing to notice that the other couple were too groggy to make small talk or conversationally draw upon a common past. At some ten-minute stop, where the Spanish adobe architecture squatted as if stunned under a sky full of vaporous thunderheads, Bech ran off the train to find a drugstore and replenish his supply of Trojans. He saw nothing near the station but buckskin and pottery souvenirs of the West, and heard the conductor call all aboard. The train had become a conscience to him, a home he hurried back to with panic.

"That's all right," Alice said that night. "I wouldn't mind having a baby of yours."

"But—" he began, thinking of her unsuspecting husband.

"It's my body," she said, a woman ahead of her time. He wondered if inside every conventional housewife there was such a sexual radical. She took mercy on him: "Don't worry—I'm about to have my period. You're safe." She laughed then, a brief tough snicker, as if her voice had been lowered by a momentary empathy with a man's point of view.

After sleepwalking through the day, they gained a second wind as night fell on the duned, saguaro-dotted desert. "Your place, or mine?" he had asked.

"Yours," she said. Having a choice—a little play in their situation—amused her. "I hate that nasty little overhang; my feet get claustrophobic." His slightly higher roomette had no such feature. They could spread out, relatively. Having mounted the two steps, they felt on top of the world. Their three days, he often reflected afterward, had composed a courtship, a honeymoon, and a marriage. You fuck at first to stake a claim, and afterward to keep the claim staked. They were less ravenous, this second night together, and tender in their genitals, and slept for several stretches of an hour or more. They could hear, in the sudden gulp and changed pitch, as of a huge musical instrument, the train entering tunnels, and feel its wheels carefully fumble over the switch points at some crucial junction. They could feel the train climb, and sinuously labor through some pass, on a canyon's curved edge, beneath the unseen stars hanging cold and close above the desert mountains. As he sensed the night tilt and slowly swerve toward its end, Bech in his sexual hysteria and exhaustion began to cry, smearing his tears with his face, like a deer marking a tree, across her belly, her breasts, a kind of spiritual semen, leaving its own slimy glitter. As she submitted to this, she patted and tugged his thick, resilient hair.

The line of people with books to sign had no end in sight. "Would you just make this one 'To Frank'? He's my father-in-law, he loves your work, he says you've really spoken to his generation." "Could you personalize this one 'To Lyndi'? That's 'L,' 'Y,' 'N,' 'D,' 'I.' Perfect. Thanks so much. It's wonderful to have you here in the Hoosier State."

By daylight the Mojave Desert yielded, an oasis at a time, to the California paradise. Pastel houses and palm trees multiplied to make a horizontal city, oddly colorless under a sky as blue and unflecked as a movie-set backdrop. The train crept to a final bump in Mission-style Union Station, and there fell upon all its length the flurry and sudden hustle of a little world coming apart, with some porters to tip and others to beckon on the platform, with farewells to be said or avoided. Alice, at his side all morning in the club car, sleeping with her head on his shoulder, had vanished. He went onto the platform, into the unreally benign air. She had put the distance of two or three cars between them when he spotted her, leading a porter and his trolley, down beside the locomotive, where the triumphant engineer traded guffaws with a uniformed station official. She merged with a man in a brown outfit—slacks one shade, jacket another; how gauche, Bech had thought—and melted into the crowd, his claim reclaimed. Bech had the impression that Oglethorpe was bald. What happened next? Over the years he forgot why whenever he saw a woman with a touch of rash or roughness on her cheeks he was stirred and saddened.

He had imagined he would somehow see her again. The universe, having witnessed so sublime a coupling, would arrange it. And so it had, in its unsatisfactory fashion. The last fan in line went away with his authentic Henry Bech signature, that tiny piece of him chipped from his drastically dwindled life, and there was no one left in the auditorium lobby but the bookstore staff, packing all his unsold books into boxes, and the tired but cheery local matron, perhaps herself a secret Venus, who had chaired the committee that had got him here. The librarian of Indianapolis had gone home. The sight of his books, the seven thin, passé titles, being briskly stashed in boxes disgusted Bech. No matter how many he sold and signed, there were always tons left, wasted paper. These women who showed up at his readings did it, it seemed clear, to mock his books—clever, twisted, false books, empty of almost all that mattered, these women he had slept with were saying. We, *we* are your masterpieces. ♦

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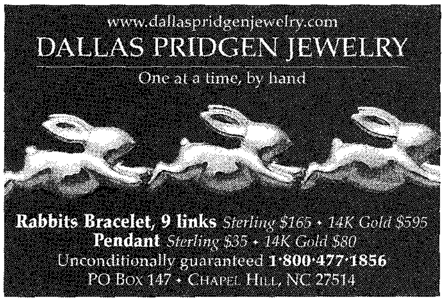

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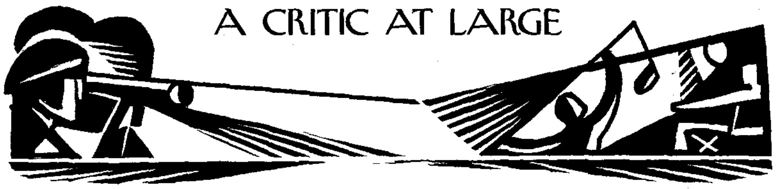

A MAN ENTRANCED

How Robert Bresson made art movies exciting.

BY ANTHONY LANE

WHO'S afraid of Robert Bresson? Me, for a start. There are movie directors who are monsters on the set, and others who reserve their terrorizing for the screen: nothing pleased Alfred Hitchcock more than to send five hundred innocent citizens rocketing vertically out of their seats. But Bresson is something else. He has made no scary movies; indeed, he might well consider the notion of a horror film to be beneath his consideration. Little is known of him personally, and even less is reported. One actress who worked closely with him described him as "implacable." Yet there is something about the very *idea* of Bresson that afflicts his admirers with a kind of dry-throated awe and his detractors with snorts of dismay. It's not that I don't look forward to a Bresson picture; it's just that as I shuffle into the theatre I feel like a pupil approaching the principal's door, wondering what crimes I may have committed and how I must answer for them.

In short, I feel like a character in Bresson. In the nineteen-fifties—the high-water mark of Bresson, the period of "Pickpocket," "A Man Escaped," and "Diary of a Country Priest"—moviegoers came to recognize the typical bearing of the Bresson hero, with his air of demure devastation. Like Raskolnikov in "Crime and Punishment," Bresson's pickpocket lives alone. He endures difficult relations with his mother and scarcely knows how to respond to the tender advances of a young woman, and he seems to come alive only when his misdemeanors begin to obsess him. As he rehearses his moves with a friend, the camera cuts from lapel to button to a wallet dropped sweetly into a palm, while Baroque music sings out on the soundtrack. If you had read your Dostoyevsky, the sight of this was not, perhaps, too traumatic, but it would be fair to say that neither here nor in Europe had ordinary viewers ever seen anything like it—nor, as it turned out, would they see anything like it again. Filmmakers remember Bresson by heart, and plunder him at will; few of us who watched "American Gigolo" realized that the closing sequence, with Lauren Hutton making eyes at Richard Gere, was a passionate homage to "Pickpocket." But the age of Bresson himself, and of Bergman and Fellini in their prime—the age of moviegoing as a hallowed and improving habit—now feels more distant than the Berlin of Brecht and Weill.

Your chance to revisit history, and to wallow in the human condition, gets a big push this month when the Museum of Modern Art unveils a retrospective of Bresson's work. Organized by James Quandt, of the Cinémathèque Ontario, where it was shown in the fall, the retrospective will run from January 22nd to February 7th in New York before moving on. Since Bresson has made a mere fourteen films, of which only one lasts more than a hundred minutes, you could sit down and run through the whole corpus in about twenty hours, with an eleven-minute break for lunch.

Bresson himself will not be attending. He is still alive, living an hour or so outside Paris with his second wife, Mylène. These days, he gives no interviews in person, and does not care to be photographed—a pity, for the few images that exist show a face that one would like to see more of. (That may sound prurient, but his own movies have taught us that it's never rude to stare.) The French cover of Bresson's book of aphorisms, "Notes on Cinematography," shows a full lip, a fuller shock of hair, and eyes that turn down at the corners, as if the lids had, over a lifetime, drooped in sadness. The mixture of sensuality and disillusionment comes as no surprise; what takes you aback is the note of merriment tucked away in his steady gaze.

Robert Bresson was born in 1901. Or 1907. Or was it 1911? According to James Quandt, the first date seems to be the correct one, but Bresson himself is unforthcoming on the matter. He studied classics and philosophy, and then decided to become a painter. That plan fell slowly away, to be replaced by a dedication to cinema. The funny thing is that his own début was a comedy. For many years, "Public Affairs" (1934) was missing in action, presumed lost; then, in 1987, a substantial chunk was dug up at the Cinémathèque in Paris. The picture was described by its director as "*un comique fou*," full of chorus lines, sinking ships, and yawning statues. It is set in an imaginary kingdom, like the Freedonia in which the Marx Brothers cut loose, and one is tempted to speculate that Bresson was using "Public Affairs" to flush all traces of frivolity out of his system. From here on, he would go private.

From 1940 to 1941, Bresson spent some nine months as a prisoner of war in Germany. He returned to France and made his first two full-length films: "Angels of Sin" (1943), which is set in a convent, and "The Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne" (1945), which would also be set in a convent if the characters knew what was good for them. "The Ladies" was poorly received at the time, but its classic status is now as solid as that of Cocteau's "Beauty and the Beast" or "Orphée." Indeed, it was Cocteau who wrote the dialogue. In a sense, he had little to do; the film is adapted from an episode in Diderot's "Jacques the Fatalist," and some of the lines were transplanted with barely a scratch. But Diderot, ever the game player, kept interrupting his tale with boozy backchat; Cocteau and Bresson strip it down and leave us with the stony bones of the plot. A wealthy woman takes revenge on her lover, who has announced that his feelings for her have grown cold. Feigning a civilized friendship, she introduces him to a young ingénue, and only when the match is made and the wedding ceremony over does she reveal that he has ended up with damaged goods: the ingénue used to be a nightclub dancer, with a flurry of eager men at her bedroom door. In Diderot, the

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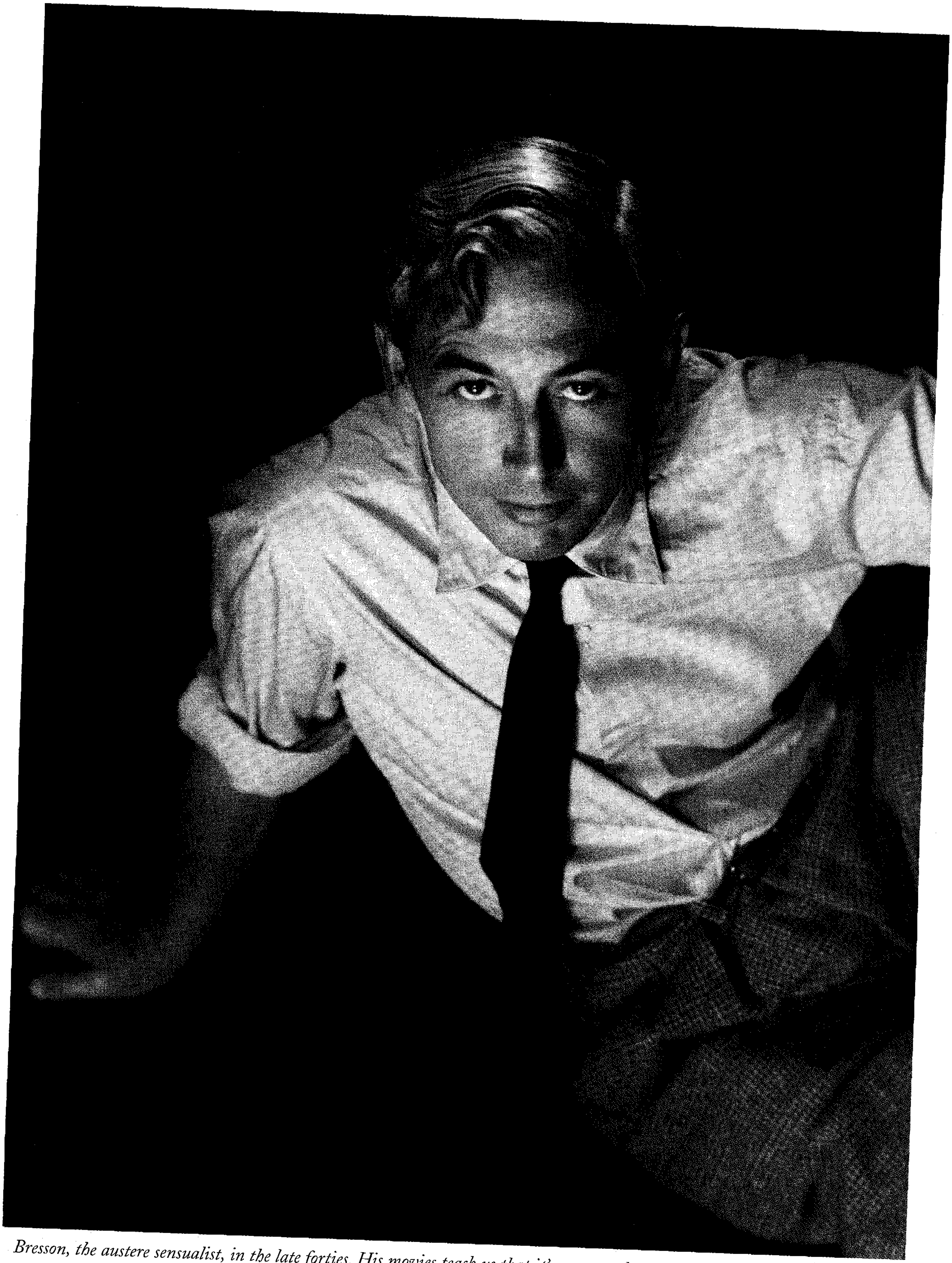
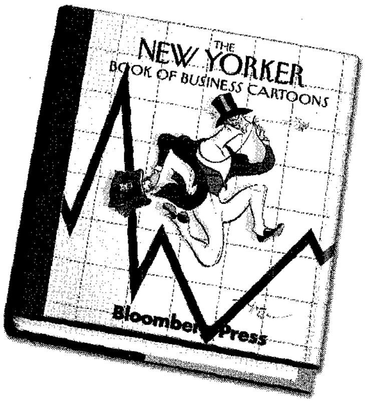


Bresson, the austere sensualist, in the late forties. His movies teach us that it's never rude to stare. Photograph by Sam Levin.

Very funny business, indeed!



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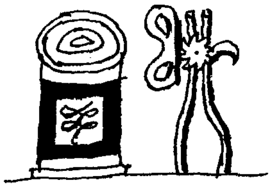
man forgives his wife, and they live happily ever after. In Bresson, she drops into a major swoon; whether this is death by shame or a touch of the vapors we cannot tell.

The story was a bit rich in the eighteenth century; by the time it hits modern Paris the whole thing should collapse under the weight of absurdity. Who gives a damn about the past of a loved one? But Bresson, with a deftness that would mark the remainder of his career, outwitted plausibility to arrive at a dream logic of his own. None of his movies could be called fantastical, not even “Lancelot of the Lake” (1974), which began with knights cantering through leafy Arthurian glades. Yet his entire œuvre seems to move—to glide rather than labor—under a nameless spell, as if he had hypnotized his players before the cameras rolled. Cocteau, the addict of myth and fairy tale, helped to breed in Bresson a fascination with what is bound to happen—with acts for which we alone are responsible but which somehow remain beyond our control, and even beyond the grope of our understanding. By the time Bresson had finished with them, of course, they no longer looked like fairy tales; they looked like acts of God.



THIS is where Bresson, for many moviegoers, starts to get out of hand. He was a Catholic by birth, although he is since said to have labelled himself “a Christian atheist.” To complicate matters further, the views that are most frequently ascribed to his work are Jansenist. Named for a seventeenth-century bishop of Ypres and condemned as heretical by the Pope, Jansenism cleaved to a peculiarly bleak reading of human experience and its attendant follies; the only possibility of redemption lay in the mystery of God's grace. The most famous adherent of this mirthless creed was Pascal, although his worldliness made him, perhaps, less a convert than an interested party; his “Pensées” are twice quoted in “Notes on Cinematography,” and Bresson's 1950 movie, “Diary of a Country Priest,” which followed its lonely central figure through the agonies of stomach cancer, closed with the image of a cross and the murmured words “All is grace.” Nine years later, “Pickpocket” ended with the shamed hero pressing against his girlfriend through prison bars and saying, “In order to reach you...what a strange way I had to take.” Over the years, Bresson also planned a life of St. Ignatius of Loyola and an adaptation of the Book of Genesis, but neither was ever made.

The crucial thing, at this point, is to hold your nerve. The fact that Susan Sontag wrote an essay entitled “Spiritual Style in the Films of Robert Bresson” is no reason you shouldn't take a date to see “Pickpocket” at MOMA. At most, the film is what, following St. Ignatius, you might call a spiritual exercise; it is bracing stuff, and there are moments that are not simply exciting but engineer the excitement so beautifully that you feel like laughing with glee. The sequence that shows a trio of pickpockets working a rail station—brazenly plucking a woman's clutch bag, say, as she tucks it under her arm, and replacing it with a folded newspaper—is seamless enough to make you leave the theatre and turn immediately to a life of crime. This is not exactly what Pascal had in mind.

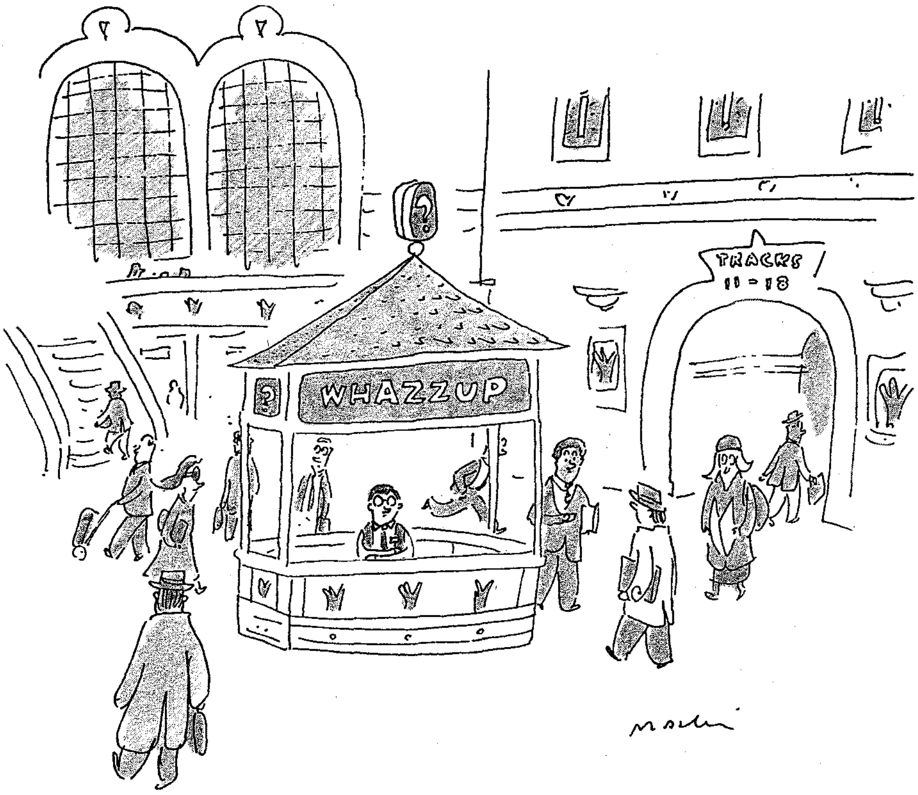
Rising from the works of Bresson, in fact, is the heartening suggestion that within the ranks of human venality crime is not much to write home about. There are sins more acute than filching a handbag, and more damnable even than murder; the mercy of the divine, for instance, is unlikely to descend upon those who are consumed with self-love—a commendably high principle on which to conduct your life, but not, I suspect, the ideal starting point for someone hoping to make it in the movie business. Given that film stars take their vanity freshly squeezed for breakfast, it is hard to see how Bresson could bring himself to work with them; in the most audacious move of his professional life, he solved this quandary by phasing out fellow-professionals altogether. No stars, no performers of any kind: in “Notes on Cinematography” Bresson even disdains the word “actor,” preferring “model,” as if he were a painter. “Most films appear to me as competitions in grimaces,” he once said, and so, starting with “Diary of a Country Priest,” he hired a succession of gaunt, malnourished, non-grimacing nobodies to carry his movies. Each of them threatens to become a bore, and yet their pale, morose expressions grow on you, like the unsmiling faces of saints in Sienese paintings.

ALL this—the austere Bresson method, and the stunned but purposeful behavior of his protagonists—could have remained at the level of an intriguing experiment. He could have been a footnote in the history of cinema; instead, he became a headline, and what made the difference was a 1956 film called "A Man Escaped," or, in its full and catchy French title, "Un Condamné à Mort S'est Échappé, ou Le Vent Souffle Où Il Veut." That gives away the plot: we know from the opening credits that the imprisoned Fontaine—based on a wartime member of the French Resistance, and played by a Sorbonne philosophy student called François Leterrier—will succeed in his jailbreak. Such knowledge should render the action superfluous; instead, it frees Bresson up to insist upon the intricacies of liberation—to fix our gaze upon the hero as he sharpens the handle of a spoon into a makeshift chisel. The movie redefines suspense: the traditional question of whether something will or will not happen becomes infinitely less tense than the urge to discover *how* it comes about. If you have a taste for religious allegory, "A Man Escaped" can be viewed as an allegory of the soul's glorious flight from the body—or, better still, as a shapely dramatization of the ancient contest between predestination and free will. Fontaine is one of the chosen, but only the momentum of his own courage will earn him the benison of grace.

These pressing metaphysical matters hang around at the back of what is, by any reckoning, a great adventure story. Only thus can you account for the sheer, startling jubilation of the film's climax; people came out of "The Shawshank Redemption" looking satisfied, but I have seen them leave "A Man Escaped" as if they were walking on air—as if they had just scaled a couple of walls themselves. This reaction is all the odder because the film itself is a model of hushed restraint; Bresson has always been the master of ellipsis, but here he surpassed himself, with a flurry of quick, grave scenes that gently bounce the action on its way. Why the result should be all serenity and no haste is, frankly, beyond my comprehension, although I suspect that Mozart was a big help. Only one piece of music is used, a snatch of the Kyrie from the Mass in C Minor, and Bresson plays it at least seven times, most movingly when the men are emptying their slop pails in the prison yard. With its sacramental air, this sequence is the opposite of those endless shots in "Death in Venice" when Visconti forcibly sank us in a lagoon of Mahler's Fifth; he was covering his options, making the loveliness of the Lido lovelier still, whereas Bresson crisply conscripts a few phrases of Mozart to convince us that transcendence is available to even the most sordid of human acts. We are all in the shit, but some of us are looking at the stars.

If Bresson's taste in music is impeccable—the films resound not just with Mozart but with Lully, Bach, Schubert, and Monteverdi—it's nothing compared with his taste in silence. He once noted, with approval, Debussy's habit of playing the piano with the lid down. To anyone who staggered out of "Titanic" with busted eardrums, the Bresson season should come as a blessed relief. You leave his movies with senses peeled, your memory jangling with the keys that the Nazi guard rattles against the bannisters in "A Man Escaped" and with the harsh raking of the gravel in "Diary of a Country Priest." The residue of those pictures, and of the three that followed "Pickpocket"—"The Trial of Joan of Arc" (1962), "Au Hasard Balthazar" (1966), and "Mouchette" (1967)—is a sense that the world revolves in an ominous quiet, and that we should prick up our ears, like dogs, to every rustle and scrape. There are countless books and articles linking Bresson to other directors of noted solemnity, but the man whom he most reminds me of is Jacques Tati. The trembling peace that envelops Monsieur Hulot has the same dire vulnerability as the hush in which Bresson's pickpocket reaches behind him for a wad of banknotes, or in which Mouchette, a teenage girl, rolls repeatedly down a riverbank. Tati punctures the silence with the *pock* of a tennis ball or the infuriating *boing* of a swing door, whereas Bresson appalls us with the offscreen splash of the girl who drowns, but the cloistral suspense is the same.

Maybe that is why the hero of "Au Hasard Balthazar" is a long-suffering donkey (in Bresson's eyes, presumably, the ideal performer). I admire the Bresson pictures of the sixties, but they are stringently unlovable works; at some point, Bresson's fondness for people who were both besieged and defiant



subsided into a despairing predilection for pure victims. I wonder whether this was a straightforward issue of history: the further the Second World War receded into the distance, the sadder and more stranded Bresson's characters became. The fact is that he was a prisoner of war and then an inhabitant of Occupied France, and his best films are soaked through with the combative dread of those years. The nuns in "Angels of Sin" unwittingly conceal a killer in their midst, and the vengeful heroine of "The Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne" mocks the newly besotted lover with the line "So you spend your life waiting on stairs, in grottoes, at railway stations. . . ." He could be a member of the Resistance on the run. The whole movie, with its rapid changes of apartment and identity, and with its collars turned up against the rain, lends a thrilling furtiveness to the pursuit of love. For some twenty years, while the war was fresh in his mind, that fretting persisted; I smell fear even in "Diary of a Country Priest." We watch the priest writing his journal and simultaneously hear his voice reading it—a strange doubling effect, as if he were huddling close to his own secrets, not wanting them to be glimpsed by God, or by someone worse.

Little of that consternation survives in the later films. They seem so sure of catastrophe that the possibility of eluding it, let alone fighting it off, hardly seems to arise. Sontag, in her acute 1964 essay on Bresson, wrote that "it is almost impossible to imagine a Bresson film in color." Five years later, we got a Bresson film in color. In all, we got *five* of them: "A Gentle Woman" (1969), "Four Nights of a Dreamer" (1971), "Lancelot of the Lake" (1974), "The Devil Probably" (1977), and "Money" (1983). If you like to think that color means mellowing, think again: most of these movies are as hard as ice. Three of them are obsessed with suicide, and the two others concern multiple slaughter. Bresson retreats in part from his reliance on nonprofessionals—"A Gentle Woman" features the screen début of Dominique Sanda—but there is no letup in the haunted automatism of the performances, and some of the line readings in "Four Nights of a Dreamer" sound as if they came from beyond the grave. It is touching to watch Bresson coming to grips with the modern world; there are hippies here, and sing-alongs by the banks of the Seine, and even a heroin junkie. But group behavior is not Bresson's forte; American audiences, weaned on Brando, were never going to be impressed by the weedy gang of bikers who menaced Mouchette, and I cannot watch these pictures of the seventies without feeling nostalgic for the glumly beatific loners of the fifties.

On the other hand, there is "Money"—the best film ever made by a senior citizen, not least because it has all the sprightly economy of youth. Adapted from a Tolstoy tale, "The Forged Coupon," and set in present-day Paris, it centers on a counterfeit banknote that changes hands and besmirches all that it touches. One young man begins the film with a job, a wife, and a child, and ends it as a murderer. No one is spared the axe in this picture; like Flaubert or Maupassant, Bresson takes a clean swing at an entire society. And yet the film is not a downer; you feel spruced and vivified by the miraculous distilling of the narration and by the possibility that the sinner, in his last days and hours, has met with saintliness face to face. What is more, "Money" is a kind of ghost story: Bresson's patient camera treats the components of the visible world as if they were possessed. The wretched banknote itself, of course, crackles with the hint of evil, but the menace spreads—to a telephone that is crouched and ready to ring, to a food ladle that would make a useful weapon, and to the small shriek of a mug being scraped across the floor. Only a European, perhaps, could have arrived so naturally at this surreal reversal: men are dead souls, but the stuff that surrounds them is alive.

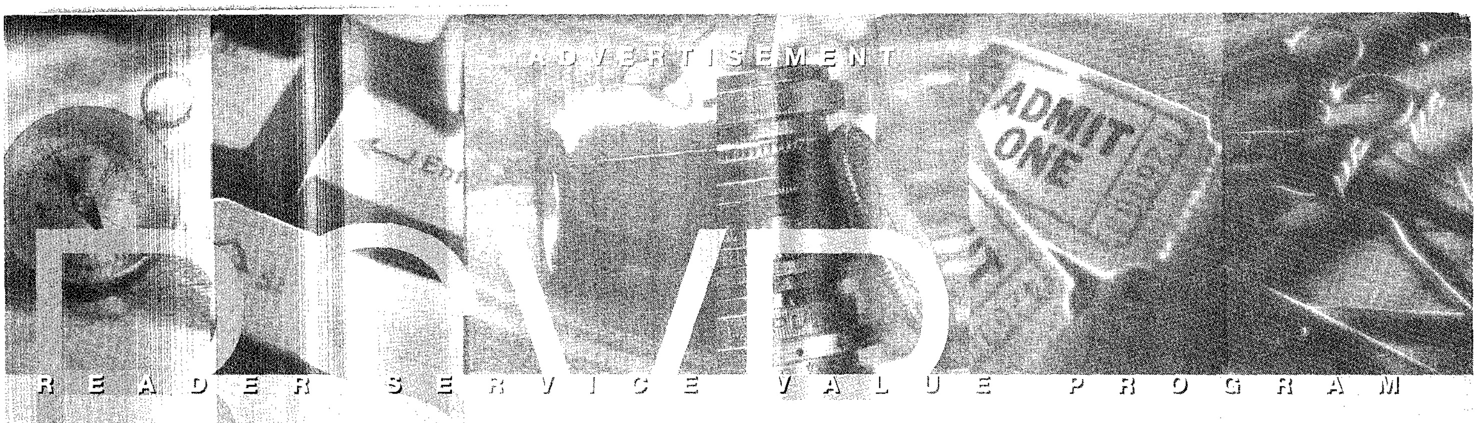
For many moviegoers, needless to say, Bresson's late masterpiece will confirm their worst fears. To American eyes, he is easily cast not just as a purveyor of hard-core art movies but as a parody of the type—dark, difficult, allergic to pleasure, and stubbornly Eurocentric. The roster of authors whom he has brought to the screen is unrepentantly highbrow, although one could argue that it demonstrates the perfect pitch of his taste: Diderot, Georges Bernanos, Tolstoy, and, time and again, Dostoyevsky. I count myself an ardent Bresson supporter, but even I laughed out loud when, cruising the aisles at Tower Video on Broadway, I found a tape of "Mouchette" and read this on the back of the box:

> Mouchette, a sensitive 14-year-old, lives amidst the peasant squalor of an isolated rural community. Her alcoholic father and terminally ill mother all but abandon her to become a child of the streets. Not surprisingly, her fate is sealed when she is abducted and raped by a half-witted game poacher.

That "not surprisingly" is a stroke of genius. Whoever wrote it was attuned to the doomy expectations of art-house fans, who would, one imagines, applaud Bresson's declaration that "there is nothing more stupid, more vulgar, than working for an audience." At his best, however, Bresson is anything but hostile; he has a matchless ability to work *with* an audience, and to wrap us in the skin of a film. His great achievement, in "A Man Escaped" and elsewhere, is to tear at the wall that exists between art cinema and commercial movies: there is nothing more visceral, even in Hitchcock, than Fontaine's lunge for freedom, just as there are moments in Hitchcock—or in Fred Astaire, for that matter—that provide exactly the perverse, half-dreamed, faintly cruel suspension of the ordinary which, for better or worse, we associate with the art house. Worshippers of Bresson, who use his work as a stick to punish lesser pictures, should be referred to an interview he gave in 1965, in which he rhapsodized over a single shot from "Goldfinger." Contrary to his reputation, Bresson does not set his heart, or bang his head, against the joys of existence; he merely points out that they can be ferociously hard to come by, and all too easy to lose. More than ever, we need movies to remind us that life is not just a cabaret but a crucible. Robert Bresson made it his business to look coolly on the heat of the moment, and, if he has really given us his last movie, who will take up the burden of that task? ♦

> Each of the local fellowships stresses the teachings of Buddha, which means Enlightened One. Buddha, whose name was Siddhartha Gautama, is believed to have lived in northern Indiana around 500 B.C.
>
> —*Bloomington (Ind.) Herald-Times.*

Home-town boy makes good.



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8 AID + A
10 MINTS (2 defs.)
11 SENSE (*cents* hom.)
12 F(LEE)T (FT = FighT extremely)
13 ARE(n)AS
15 SNIP (rev.)
16 PEN + CHANT
17 ISLE (*aisle* hom.)
18 LEGS (hidden: acronym)

DOWN

1 S + CAN
2 TOILETRIES (anag.)
3 END + ANGER
4 M + O + VIE
5 S + MATTERING
6 TEA SE + T
9 ANTE + NNAE (*Anne* anag.)
11 SCAMPI (hidden)
12 FAR(C)E
14 OPTS (anag.)

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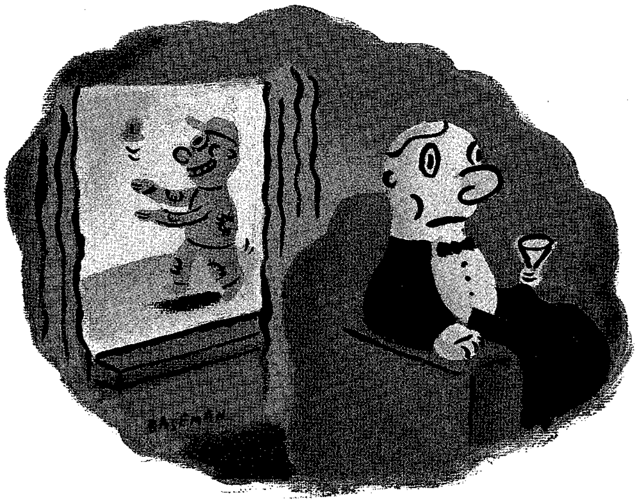
NO SATISFACTION

The trials of the shopping nation.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

WHAT could be more American than shopping? This is the country that invented the mail-order catalogue, the shopping mall, and "retail therapy." Other nations may have overtaken us in areas like education, manufacturing, and public transportation, but they haven't come close to us in the art of zipping around town with a wallet full of plastic. A century after Thorstein Veblen introduced the phrase "conspicuous consumption," Americans consume more than five trillion dollars' worth of goods and services a year. This eagerness to spend stands in contrast to the wary attitude of consumers in many other countries—Japan, for example—and it hasn't gone unnoticed abroad. The *Financial Times*, Europe's leading business newspaper, recently referred to Americans as the industrial world's "consumers of last resort" and urged us to keep shopping, in the interest of global prosperity.



When did keeping up with the Joneses get to be so expensive—and so consuming?

GARY BASEMAN

We are answering the call. A couple of weeks ago, at the annual conference of the American Economic Association, in New York, Alan Blinder, a former vice-chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, pointed out that the personal-savings rate is now "a nice round number," and that number is zero. In the aggregate, Americans are spending every dollar they take home. Consumer spending has risen strongly throughout the economy, but it has been most visible at the high end. Robert Frank, a Cornell economist, writes in "Luxury Fever" (Free Press; $25) that there are waiting lists for, among other things, Lexus utility vehicles, Hermès handbags, Prada pants, Cartier jewelry, and Gulfstream V jets. The lust for expensive brands has spread to hitherto prosaic items, such as kitchen stoves, golf clubs, and lawn furniture. When Frank recently tried to replace his old garden grill, which he had bought for $89.95 a decade ago, he found that the cheapest model available cost several hundred dollars, and that the fastest-growing segment of the market was for "professional" grills, costing as much as five thousand dollars.

To a free-market economist, the upscale buying bug is nothing to be concerned about. If wealthy people are paying five thousand dollars for garden grills, so be it; garden grills must be making them happy or they wouldn't spend their hard-earned money on them. Frank doesn't see it that way. To him, the passion for expensive goods is a debilitating disease that wastes trillions of dollars a year and "to one degree or another has all of us in its grip." And, he adds, "a host of careful studies suggest that across-the-board increases in our stocks of material goods produce virtually no measurable gain in our psychological or physical well-being."

THE notion that money can't buy happiness was expressed quantitatively twenty-five years ago, by Richard Easterlin, an economist at the University of Southern California. Using data going back to the end of the Second World War, Easterlin noted that the percentage of Americans who told opinion pollsters that they were happy or very happy had increased only a little, although real income and spending per capita had quadrupled in the same period. On this basis, Easterlin concluded that the consumer society had failed to inspire human contentment, an argument that was repeated a few years later, in 1976, by Tibor Scitovsky in his book "The Joyless Economy."

Recent studies have generally confirmed Easterlin's findings on American society—one of them, cited in *The Economic Journal,* by Andrew Oswald, of the University of Warwick, did find a slight positive trend in reported happiness between 1970 and 1990, but it was very slight—and similar results have been published for most other advanced countries, including Japan, Germany, and Britain. It is now widely accepted among researchers that, as Michael Argyle, an Oxford University experimental psychologist, put it in a recent article, "money has little effect (on happiness), except at the lower end of the income scale."

According to Frank, there are two main reasons that this is true. First, human beings are extremely adaptable creatures; given time, they can get used to almost anything. This was demonstrated dramatically twenty years ago by three psychologists—Philip Brickman, Dan Coates, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman—who interviewed a group of lottery winners and a group of less fortunate souls. They found that the lottery winners were no happier than the control group—at least, as their happiness was measured by the responses to questionnaires. Frank cites similar studies showing that prisoners are no glummer than people at liberty. (Both prisoners and lottery winners go through an initial change in their level of subjective well-being, but it wears off after a few months.) Even people left paralyzed by accidents report only modestly lower levels of happiness once they have become acclimatized to their reduced expectations of life.

These findings suggest that people have a genetically determined "set point" of contentment, and this argument has also been advanced by David Lykken, a University of Minnesota psychologist, in his new book, "Happiness" (Golden Books; $23). Lykken's research, which involved a large group of identical twins who were separated at birth, received a lot of publicity a couple of years ago, when it was published in a professional journal. The twins in each pair, with the same genetic makeup, were found to have similar levels of subjective well-being even though they had led quite different lives. Lykken and his co-author, Auke Tellegen, wrote, "It may be that trying to be happier is as futile as trying to be taller." Lykken now thinks that this conclusion was wrong. He still believes in "set points," but in "Happiness" he writes that people can "bounce along above their set points by learning some new habits," such as keeping busy, taking regular exercise, and getting married.

The other reason, according to Frank, that money can't buy happiness was memorably formulated by H. L. Mencken, who defined a rich man as one who earns a hundred dollars a year more than his wife's sister's husband. People's spending patterns, as recent research confirms, are driven primarily by what other people are doing. If everybody else in the office is driving an old Chevy and I have a Ford Explorer, then I feel fine. If all my colleagues trade up to Explorers, then I need a Lincoln Navigator to maintain the same level of satisfaction. When relative concerns are taken into account, it is easy to see why economy-wide increases in income and spending have little impact on over-all happiness. For every person who moves up the spending ladder, someone else drops down. The situation is like an arms race in which both sides spend ever-increasing amounts of time and money in a futile attempt to gain an advantage.

Why are we so driven by our relative position? According to Frank, this question cannot be answered within the confines of orthodox economics, which usu-

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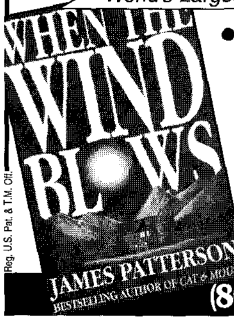

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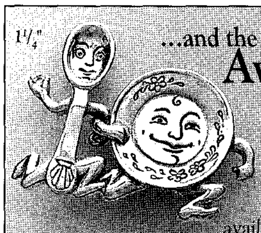

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ally models people as self-interested utility maximizers. He turns instead to evolutionary psychology and the age-old contest for mates. When food was scarce and the world was a dangerous place, it made sense for women to choose the bravest, strongest males they could find to father their children, and one way to judge men was on the basis of how many material goods they had accumulated relative to their peers. These days, the danger of starvation has receded, but opinion surveys show that women still rank earning power as the most important factor in choosing a husband. "The purpose of human motivation is not to make us happy, but to make us more likely to succeed against the competition," Frank writes. In the evolutionary context, the drive to emulate and surpass our neighbors is just one of many inherited psychological traits that made sense earlier in human history but now cause us problems. Xenophobia and a tendency to break promises are others.

"Concern about relative position is a deep-rooted and ineradicable element of human nature," Frank writes. He cites a recent study led by Michael Marmot, a British epidemiologist, which suggested that relative deprivation can affect people's health, even among the affluent. Between 1985 and 1988, Marmot and his colleagues studied the health records of ten thousand British civil servants between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five, all of whom were quite well paid. They found that the rate at which both women and men experienced life-threatening illnesses was inversely related to their employment grades. Workers who successfully climbed the pecking order were much healthier than those stuck at the bottom.

OF course, the idea that spending is driven by relative concerns is not new. Back in the late forties, James Duesenberry, an economist at Harvard, wrote a famous book about consumer spending in which he referred to the central importance of "keeping up with the Joneses." What has changed since then—at least, according to some economists—is the identity of the "Joneses." The economist Juliet Schor, of the women's-studies program at Harvard, writes in "The Overspent American" (Basic; $25), "Today a person is more likely to be making comparisons with, or choose as a 'reference group,' people whose incomes are three, four, or five times his or her own. The result is that millions of us have become participants in a national culture of upscale spending."

Schor supports her arguments by detailing the spending patterns of employees at a large telecommunications company in the Southeast. Her findings suggest that people do care about how much their colleagues spend, but they are also influenced by the life styles they see on television. When Duesenberry was writing, most Americans measured their lives against the automotive worker or truck driver who lived in the tract house next door; these days, according to Schor, they are more likely to judge themselves against the affluent yuppies who proliferate in shows like "Ally McBeal" and "Frasier." Schor claims that every additional hour of television a person watches each week increases that person's annual spending by about two hundred dollars. "The likely explanation is that what we see on television inflates our sense of what is normal," she writes. "With a few exceptions, TV characters are upper-middle-class, or even rich."

This thesis jibes with fashionable opinion about the baleful influence of television, but it is far from proved. There is another plausible explanation of the spending boom, which has less to do with the tube than with changes in the financial system. Neither Frank nor Schor dwells on this possibility, but both provide indirect evidence to support it. According to Frank, financial institutions sent out two billion seven hundred million preapproved credit-card application forms in 1995—seventeen forms for every man and woman in the country between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four. Schor discovered that two-thirds of the workers in her sample had persistent credit-card debts, and eighty-nine per cent of them had debts of some kind (not counting mortgages). These findings are replicated in the national figures. Between 1990 and 1996, the volume of credit-card debt doubled.

Americans are finding it easier than ever to finance extra spending. In the language of economists, their credit constraint has been relaxed. These days, the only thing that stops people from taking on ever-increasing amounts of debt is the fear and stigma of going broke, and even that has been fading. If households default on their loans, they can often find new sources of funds, thanks to the eagerness of lenders. (Think of all those television advertisements offering new credit cards to people with "credit problems.") The number of people filing for personal bankruptcy has more than doubled in the last decade, and now stands at about one and a half million people a year With so many people going bankrupt when the economy is doing well, it is frightening to think what might happen during a downturn.

WHEN it comes to changing our spendthrift ways, Frank and Schor have different ideas. Schor believes in self-help. "It can hardly be possible that the dumbing down of America has proceeded so far that it is either consumerism or nothing," she writes. "There's still time to find our way out of the mall." To back up this idea, she interviews a number of "downshifters," people who have taken lower-paying, less time-consuming jobs in order to have more time with their families and pursue other interests. Some are active

ART IN THE FAMILY

Three strong women expand their shared artistic legacy. Seton Smith (left), a daughter of the late architect and sculptor Tony Smith, is currently showing her photographs and photo-based installations at the Whitney Museum (through April 4th). Kiki Smith (right), Seton's older sister, whose disturbing sculptural evocations of the human body have won her an international following, has a show at Pace Prints this month and, starting in February, an exhibition at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Jane Lawrence Smith, their mother and Tony's widow, is a singer and an actress who has played on Broadway ("Oklahoma!" "Where's Charley?") and sung leading operatic roles ("Tosca," "The Magic Flute," "La Forza del Destino"). These days, she performs in Off Broadway plays and independent films; her current project is an as yet untitled production by the playwright John Jesurun.

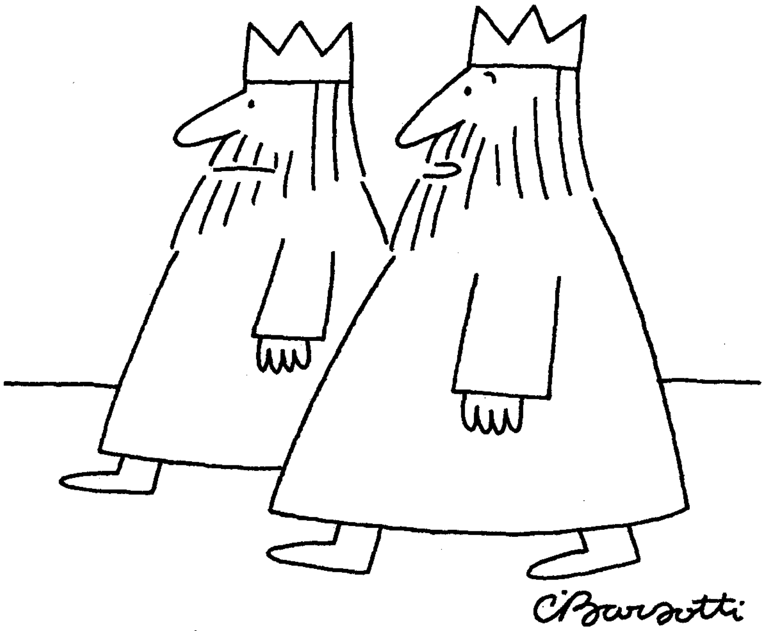
Photograph by Max Vadukul

members of the Voluntary Simplicity movement, which was launched by Duane Elgin's 1981 book of that title; others are people who just got sick of the daily grind and decided to take a break. Most seem to be enjoying life, albeit in reduced circumstances.

Schor claims that downshifting is catching on, but that isn't borne out in the national figures, which show the workweek continuing to expand. In fact, it is doubtful that downshifting will ever become a mass movement, because it runs counter to another important human trait—what psychologists call "loss aversion." There is now a wealth of experimental evidence showing that most people strongly dislike even small financial setbacks. (That is why wage cuts are so unpopular.) Since downshifting invariably involves significant financial sacrifices, it will always be a minority pursuit.

Frank favors using the Internal Revenue Service to reduce wasteful consumption. He advocates scrapping the income tax and replacing it with a tax on consumption—a proposal that makes sense if relative concerns drive households to spend more than they otherwise would. Game theorists refer to the incentives facing consumers as a "prisoner's dilemma." If all of us agreed to cut our spending at the same time, we could achieve the same level of satisfaction at lower cost. I, however, left to my own devices, have a strong incentive to welsh on the deal and spend more, because this would improve my relative position. Since everybody would see the same logic, everybody would welsh, and the spending spiral would continue. One way to prevent this outcome would be for the government to raise taxes on consumption in general, and on expensive goods in particular, which would encourage all of us to reduce our upscale spending to more reasonable levels.

Economists going back to David Hume and Adam Smith have favored a consumption tax over an income tax on theoretical grounds, but most have been put off by the practical difficulties: How would the tax be collected? Would the I.R.S. have to record every purchase? Wouldn't a tax on consumption cause a recession? Frank claims that the last danger could be averted by reforming the system gradually, and that other problems could be avoided by simply making savings exempt from taxes. Taxpayers would be assessed on the difference between what they earned and what they saved. Any money not saved would be classed as consumption. People who bought their Christmas presents at Harry Winston would end up paying a lot more tax than folks who shopped at Wal-Mart. This sounds like an attractive outcome, but Frank's plan has virtually no chance of being enacted, because it would require Congress to raise taxes on the rich. "Rates at the top levels must be sufficiently steep to provide meaningful incentives for the people atop the consumption pyramid," Frank writes. He suggests a sixty-per-cent federal tax rate on people who spend between a quarter of a million and half a million dollars a year, and a rate of seventy per cent on people who spend even more than that.



"The food's great, but the chef's a tyrant."

A humbler suggestion is to stick with the current tax system but gradually increase its progressivity—a process that the Clinton Administration began in 1993 but has failed to follow through on. Such a policy would reduce the glaring income inequalities that give rise to conspicuous consumption at the top. At the same time, the government could limit the volume of credit available to low-income households. (In Schor's sample, the average level of non-mortgage debts was almost fourteen thousand dollars.) There is now plenty of evidence that credit can be just as addictive as gambling and narcotics; there is a strong argument for regulating it accordingly.

Given the political climate, even these modest steps are unlikely to be taken. Unless something unforeseen occurs, Americans will keep up their assault on the checkout counters, at least until the stock-market bubble bursts. Neither Frank nor Schor devotes much time to Wall Street, but recent events there explain much of the recent surge in spending—especially spending on luxury goods. Since the beginning of 1995, the stock market has created more than five trillion dollars in new financial wealth, and most of that money has gone to people who were already rich. (According to Ed Wolff, of New York University, about eighty-five per cent of the country's financial wealth is owned by the richest ten per cent of households.) Not surprisingly, some of this new wealth is now finding its way into the stores, and it isn't J. C. Penney that is benefitting.

Viewed from this perspective, the luxury fever that Frank identifies is not an independent ailment but just one symptom of a much broader condition: the unbalanced and unequal nature of economic growth in modern America. If the stock market were to collapse in the next few months, the current spending boom would probably come to a rapid halt, but the underlying technological and political forces that are generating an increasingly inegalitarian society would not be much affected. That is the bad news. On the other hand, the waiting list for new Ferraris would probably disappear. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

DUANE'S DEPRESSED, by Larry McMurtry (Simon & Schuster; $26). In this novel—the conclusion of McMurtry's Thalia trilogy—the aging oil mogul Duane Moore shocks everyone in town when he parks his beloved pickup truck for the last time and begins to walk everywhere. He retreats from his family to a cabin in the woods, enters therapy, and becomes a reader of Thoreau, only to have his depression punctuated by tragedy. Although McMurtry's writing is rough, the reader is moved by the inconclusive journey of a man who knows that he must change his life but doesn't know why or how.

FEAR, by Irini Spanidou (Knopf; $21). Anna, one of the two smartest girls in her high-school class in Thessaloniki, is a victim of her military father's program to make her hard and invulnerable: a son. When she accepts her intellectual rival, the cruelly taunting Vera, as her best friend, you feel a childish desire to object, but then you hope that Vera's loving family will be a spot of warmth in Anna's miserable life. Finally, it becomes a question of whether Anna will survive at all: she feels a possibly fatal empathy for a serial killer who roams the city.

DARK CONTINENT, by Mark Mazower (Knopf; $30). This history of twentieth-century Europe rejects the notion that the last hundred years saw the inevitable triumph of great European Democracy, beset along the way by the hounds of Communism and Fascism. Instead, it presents a complex Europe that has stumbled, often blindly, from the Age of Empire to its present incarnation. Mazower has written a timely, argumentative, and ultimately optimistic book; he is particularly good at illuminating the substance of beliefs beneath ideologies.

INDIVISIBLE BY FOUR, by Arnold Steinhardt (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25). This account of the Guarneri String Quartet, as related by its first violinist, is both a success story and a love story. Like his colleagues—John Dalley, second violin, Michael Tree, viola, and David Soyer, cello—the author trained for a solo career but found the richness and depth of the chamber repertory irresistible. Steinhardt explains that although the quartet was founded in 1963, its evolution is ongoing: every season, pieces are reconsidered, nuances argued, and decisions put to the test of performance.

JACQUES HENRI LARTIGUE: PHOTOGRAPHER, introduction by Vicki Goldberg (Bulfinch; $95). Born to a life brimming over with warmth and leisure, Lartigue was given his first camera in 1901, at the age of seven, and he soon set about capturing the century in its infancy: boulevards crowded with women in unlikely hats; motorcars racing down country lanes; flying machines lifting off with their pilots hanging on for dear life. Lartigue loved velocity and motion, and this collection reflects the quickening tempo of happiness and a languorous blur of contentment.

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Rick Collignon mixes present and past, living and dead, into a forthright examination of race, belonging, and identity in his new novel ***PERDIDO***. He returns to the magical New Mexican village of Guadalupe, the setting of his acclaimed *The Journal of Antonio Montoya*, and a town with a long history of displacement. Here, a man learns that it is possible to be part of Guadalupe's tapestry without ever being fully woven into its fabric.

DURABLE GOODS by **Elizabeth Berg** takes place at the moment in a young girl's life when childhood is at an end. In the sweltering heat of a Texas summer, Katie must deal with her mother's recent death while filled with longings: for a boy to fall in love with her, for her father to stop hitting her, for her life to become less uncertain. The novel captures the pain, sorrow, and stirring hope that time's passage causes in one indomitable spirit.

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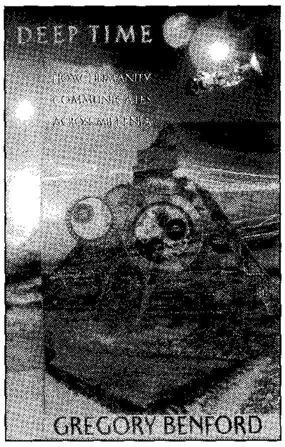

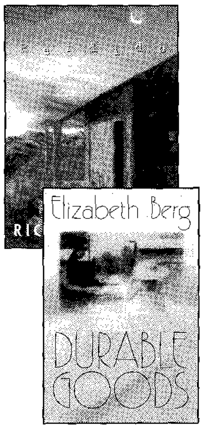

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When I need to relax,
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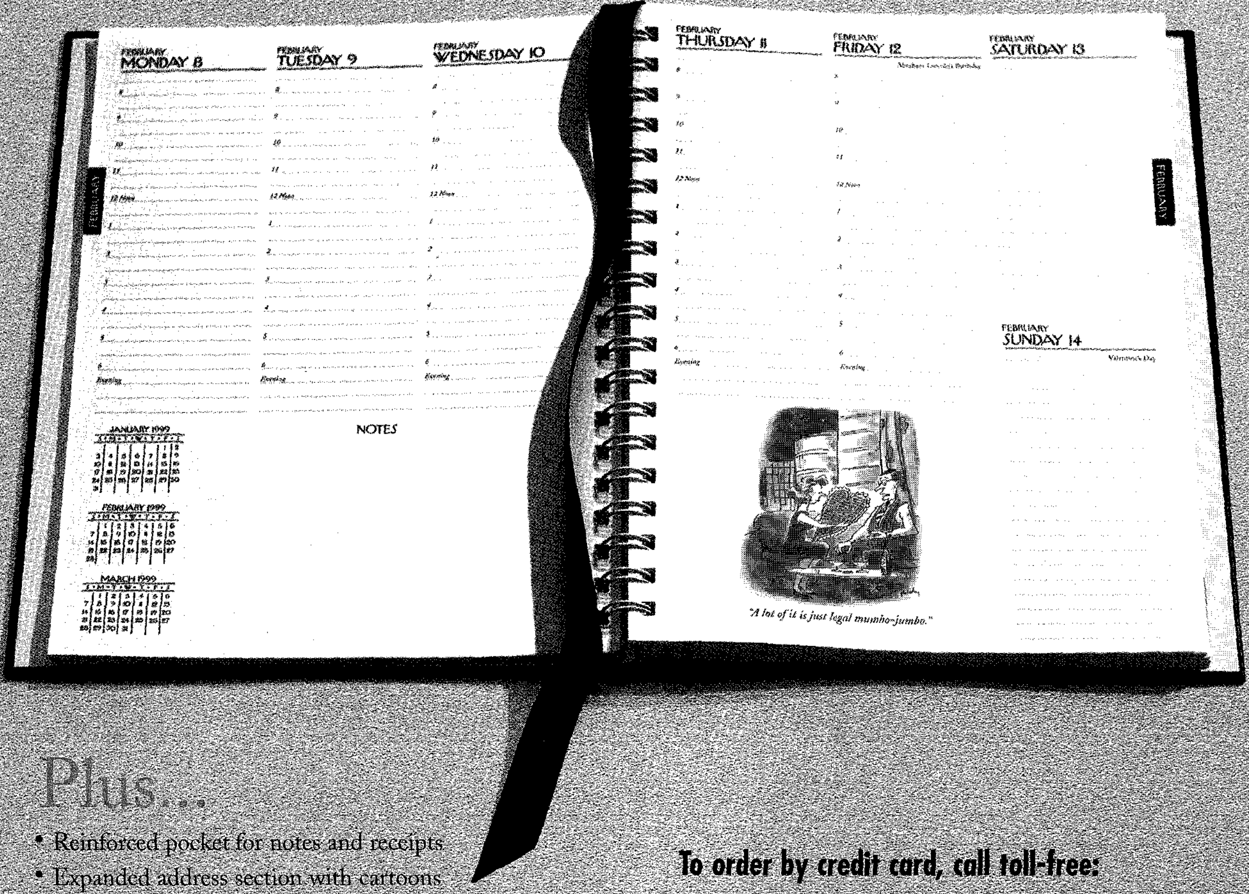
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FEBRUARY WEDNESDAY 10
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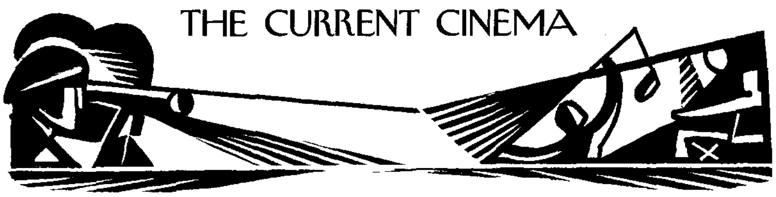
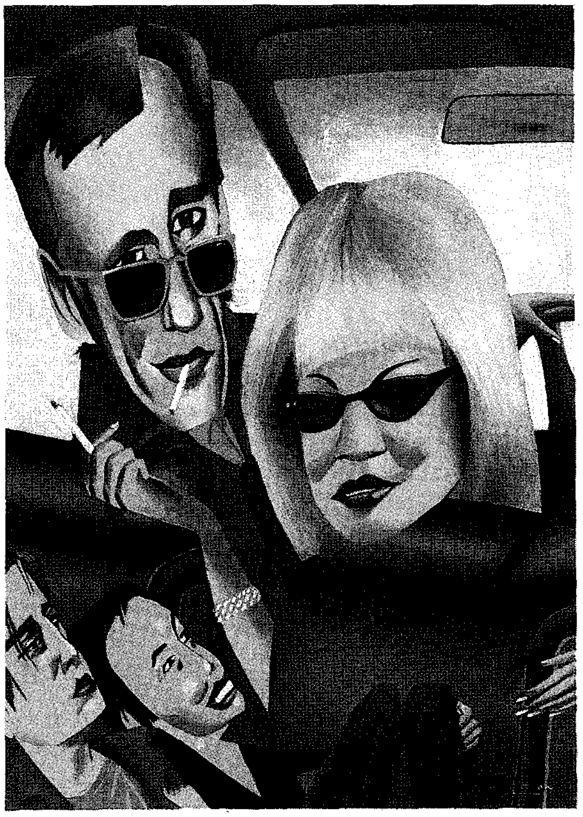


NO FREE RIDE

Larry Clark's small-time outlaws, and Robin Williams's medicine.

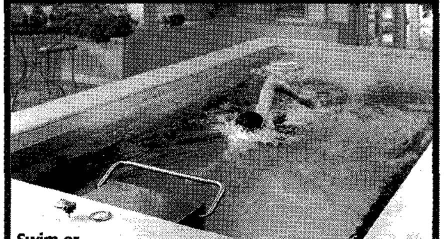
BY DAVID DENBY

JAMES WOODS has been acting on the screen for more than twenty-five years, and he can still grab us by the throat. In Larry Clark's scabrous little gangster film, "Another Day in Paradise," Woods doesn't do anything that he hasn't done before, but his snarling, flashing-knife delivery, which turns every speech into a glinting aria, gives the movie pace and rhythm—the energy that carries one through Clark's mishaps as a director. Woods plays Mel, a small-time thief and junkie who travels with Sid (Melanie Griffith) through the nowhere suburbs of the Midwest. At first, he seems genial enough. He befriends Bobbie (Vincent Kartheiser), a baby-faced teen who thinks he's tough because he can rob a candy machine and handle his beautiful junkie girlfriend, Rosie (Natasha Gregson Wagner). But Bobbie is not tough, and Mel and Sid, taking both Bobbie and Rosie along for the ride, treat the pair like lost children who deserve a little spoiling. They buy them clothes and a good time and share drugs with them. The two couples become a family of sorts, led by Mel, who would like to think that he's a brilliant thief and who boastfully teaches Bobbie all the great outlaw stuff—guns, the technique of the heist, the glories of on-the-road living. But Mel, it turns out, doesn't need a son; he needs a victim. Mel is a lowlife, a criminal; he's obsessed with his own survival, and Woods, his eyes going dead, his voice turning to iron, pulls Mel down into more and more desperate regions of paranoid futility. The movie, which was written by Christopher Landon and Stephen Chin, is ostensibly young Bobbie's story—the script is based on a book by an ex-con named Eddie Little—but Woods's performance is what shapes the narrative. Without him, the picture is unimaginable.



A family of sorts: Woods and Griffith take on two druggy teens in "Another Day in Paradise."

Larry Clark isn't much of a dramatist. Originally a photographer, he gravitates toward scenes of people sitting around doing drugs and sex. He revels in lethargic "authenticity" (i.e., squalor), and he has dreamy erotic preoccupations. The skinny, dirty teens, faces puffy from sex, who were much in evidence in his 1971 photo album, "Tulsa," dominated his 1995 feature film, "Kids," a movie that impressed some people as



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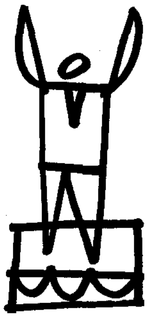
the raw truth. Clark's preoccupations have no greater purchase on truth than Whit Stillman's Peter Duchin fantasies, but he goes all the way with them: naked, or nearly naked, Vincent Kartheiser and Natasha Gregson Wagner (Natalie Wood's daughter) lie around, beautiful, vulnerable, two lost kids in their moment of happiness. I can't say that I object to looking at Wagner, but a small amount of Clarkian obsession is enough for me; the grownups are more interesting. Melanie Griffith brings to the role of a travelling junkie-moll the wistfulness that she has exhibited before but greater strength than usual, and Woods snaps the movie to attention every time Clark lets it fall into a trance. (There are repeated, long-lasting shots of the actors slowly inserting needles into their thighs, arms, and necks.) "Another Day in Paradise" doesn't go anywhere surprising, and Clark's rough handheld camera style is less original than he may think it is, but the picture does work toward a firm (bloody) resolution. If the romance of movie gangsterism is its promise of extravagant freedom and unlimited aggression, its sadness is the abrupt ending of the giddy free ride. A minor movie, but James Woods's nerve-racking anguish stayed in my head for days after I saw the film. Even when he plays a ratty loser like Mel, he's so focussed as a performer that he seems to define the nature of intelligence itself.



In "Patch Adams," a young man named Hunter (Robin Williams), a patient at a mental institution, receives the name Patch after he plugs a hole in another patient's plastic coffee cup. Upon leaving the bin, Patch Adams enters Virginia Medical College, where, as a first-year student, he disobeys regulations and wanders about the halls of the hospital that is attached to the school, cheering up the patients. For instance, he cuts a hole in a red enema bulb and puts the bulb on his nose, making a clown's face to amuse children with cancer. And he talks to an old woman, who tells him that when she was a girl she used to put her hands into the bowls of spaghetti that her mother cooked; now she longs to immerse her entire body in pasta. After this extraordinary colloquy, two years go by, and Patch, now a third-year medical student, is accosted by another student—a former enemy—who has failed to get an old woman patient at the hospital to eat anything. He requires Patch Adams, who has a "gift" with people, to help him.

Perhaps you don't need me to tell you that the old lady who won't eat turns out to be the same woman who had the pasta fantasy two years earlier. You may wonder, however, as I certainly did, whether she has been languishing in the hospital all this time, dreaming of rigatoni. Yes? No? The movie doesn't tell us, but no matter, because the poor thing, wasting away to the size of a leaf, is wheeled out of the ward and presented to Patch on the lawn in front of the hospital. There he stands in the middle of a portable swimming pool filled with spaghetti. The lady is dumped into the pool, and, happy now, she pours pasta onto Patch Adams's head. The music swells, but one problem remains: we never find out whether she eats anything. Perhaps she dies happy, submerged in Ronzoni No. 8—a baptismal-carbohydratic event of serious proportions.

Why bother with a movie like "Patch Adams"? The picture is not likely to cause a revolution in the medical schools. I take notice of it because, after a year of scandal and political turmoil in which the common sense of the American people has been much in evidence, the fact remains that millions of my countrymen have put down money to see this movie and have perhaps even remained in their seats until the climax of the film, in which Patch, in deep trouble with the dean of the medical school, is suddenly joined in support by all the people he has cured with laughter—including the little children with cancer. Most of these former patients wear red enema bulbs on their noses. Perhaps they, too, intend to become doctors.

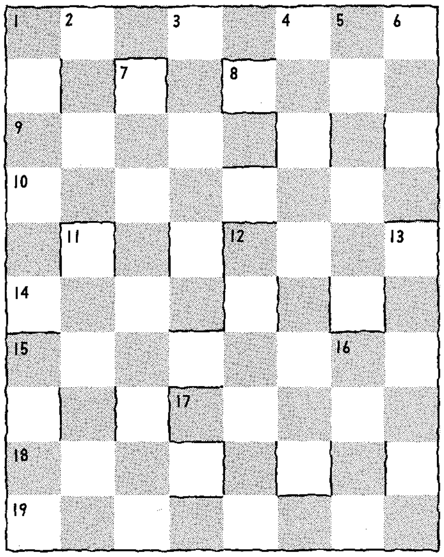
Well, at least there's a place for them to work. "Patch Adams" is based on a memoir, "Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter," by Hunter Doherty Adams—a genuine doctor, who, an end title informs us, runs an organization in West Virginia called the Gesundheit Institute, which is devoted to free treatment and loving care. Dr. Adams may well be a saint, and, for all I know, the Hollywood pros who made this picture, Steve Oedekerk (writer) and Tom Shadyac (director), may head for West Virginia when they become ill, though somehow I doubt it. Still, the movie, which reduces medical training to a choice between becoming a cold-hearted technician or a clown, is easily the most slovenly and whorishly sentimental work to become a big hit in this country since "Love Story," in 1970.

What in the world has happened to Robin Williams? The most brilliant standup comic of his generation, a man who, twenty years ago, could wander into a club at one in the morning and riff unstoppably, ecstatically, for an hour or more, has turned into a heartwarming faker. Williams has given fine, serious performances in such good movies as "Popeye," "Moscow on the Hudson," and "The Birdcage." But he now suffers from comic's megalomania, which has also begun to afflict Roberto Benigni. Williams wants to save the world with laughter. In "Good Morning, Vietnam," "Awakenings," "Mrs. Doubtfire," "What Dreams May Come," and many other movies, he has tried to free the spiritually imprisoned, loosen our tongues, loosen our bowels—he's become a purgative of second-rate feelings, a twinkly, husky-voiced leprechaun, funnelling counterculture mush through New Age mush.

What's nutty about "Patch Adams" is, of course, part of a larger Hollywood syndrome. In "Stepmom," another gift from the Christmas season, Susan Sarandon, a mom, and Julia Roberts, a stepmom, wage a furious battle over two children. First one woman performs some brilliantly imaginative feat of parenting, which leaves her rival chagrined and defeated. Then the other recovers and performs a counter-feat, leading to more triumph and chagrin. The children are the nearly passive audience for these two virtuosos of parental ability. Hollywood is so provincial, so averse to getting into the details of any kind of genuine work, that it turns every way of life into a version of what it does itself: just as medicine is reduced to entertaining people, being a parent is reduced to performing for children. In "Patch Adams," we never actually see the great man functioning as a doctor. He's just nice to people, and he makes them laugh. Good luck to Dr. Adams, but Dr. Williams should hang up his stethoscope, come down from Mt. Sinai, and get back in the pit with the real comics and the audience. ♦

8x10 CRYPTIC

NO. 74 BY JOSHUA KOSMAN



ACROSS

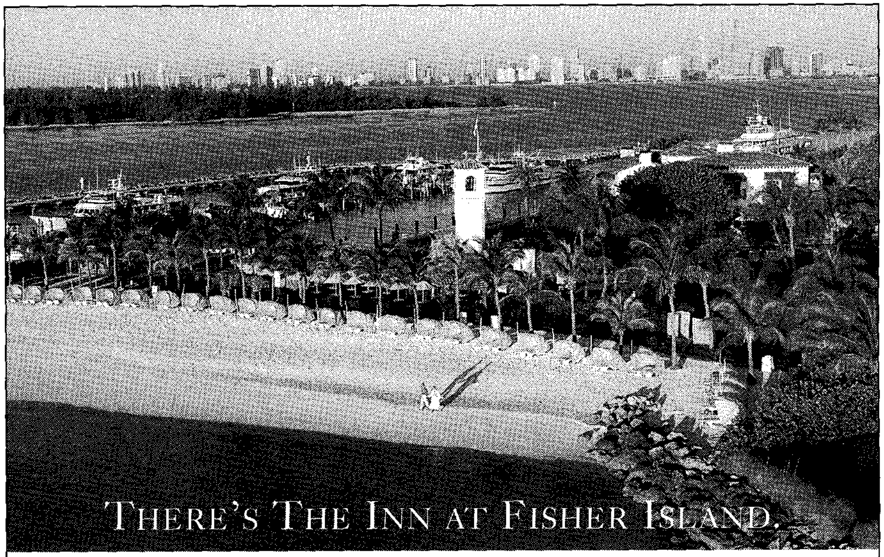
1 Agitate and lobby for folk-rocker (3,5)
8 Green stuff in cement (4)
9 Doctor fit badly, in a general sense (5)
10 *Playboy* feature took in female in the first place (8)
12 Gang leaders of Chicago recently ended warfare (4)
14 Winter vehicle with small electronic display (4)
15 Backed down, following future husband around capital of Nebraska (8)
17 Saint joins first woman and man (5)
18 Sounds like breads are affected by yeast (4)
19 Composer finally patronizes non-kosher butcher (8)

DOWN

1 Shifts pet birds, missing one (6)
2 Chief of operations on boat raised a vegetable (4)
3 Guard is fed up over result (6)
4 So I circle rotten types of chewy candy (9)
5 Charm a small Greek character? (6)
6 Require massage for the speaker (4)
7 Playful, unruly set, I think (9)
11 Endlessly clip and cut in medical facility (6)
12 Worker in taxi is a Harvard student (6)
13 Most far-ranging drama initially captured by actress Dianne (6)
15 Chop back piece off of earliest trees (4)
16 Veer unpredictably at any time (4)

• •

The solution to puzzle No. 73 appears on page 87. For a free copy of "The New Yorker's Guide to Solving Cryptic Crosswords," please send your fax number or a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Solvers' Guide," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. For an electronic version, send an E-mail to puzzleguide@newyorker.com.



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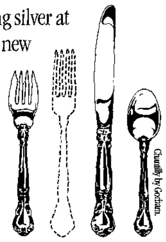

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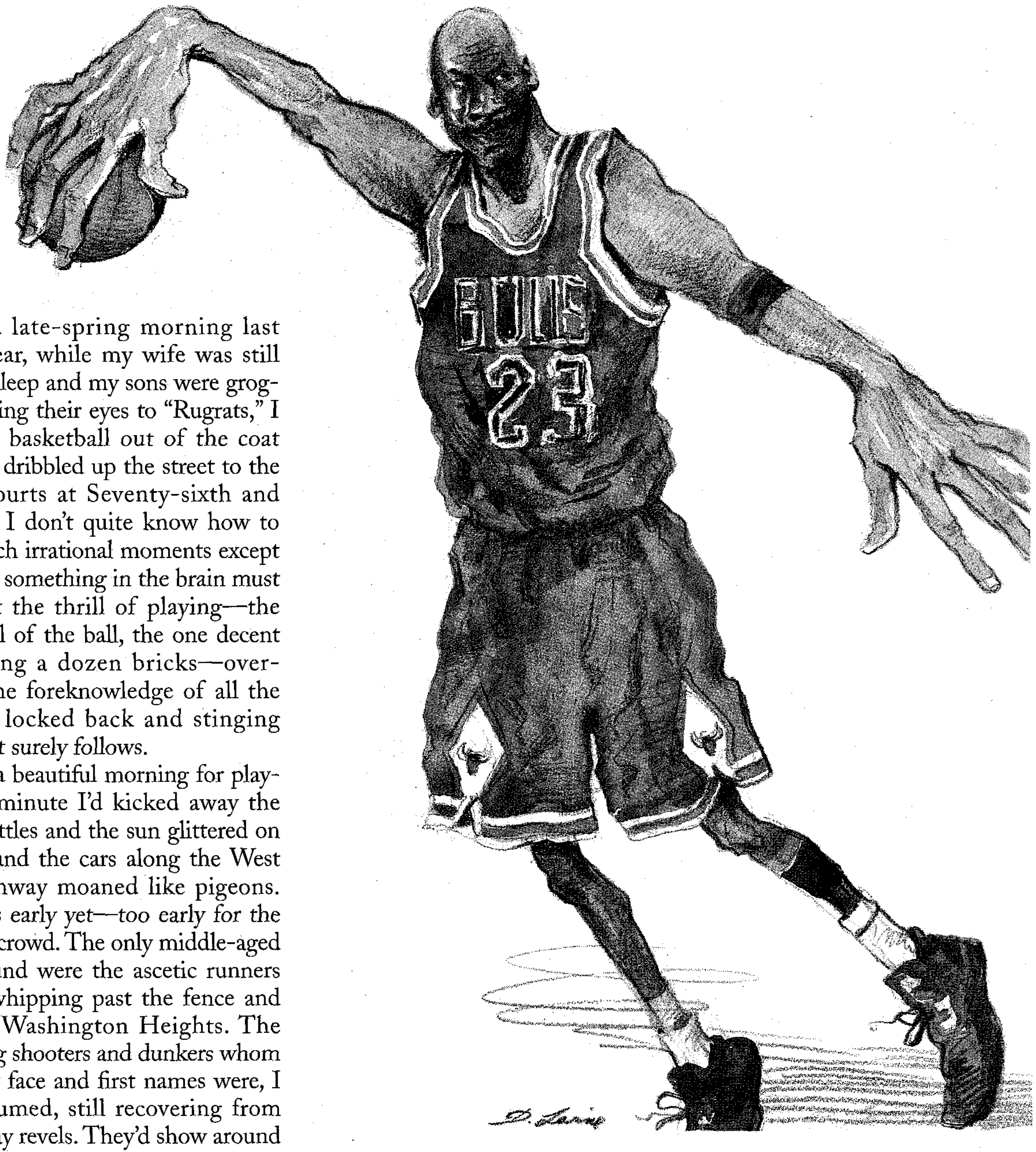
THE BACK PAGE



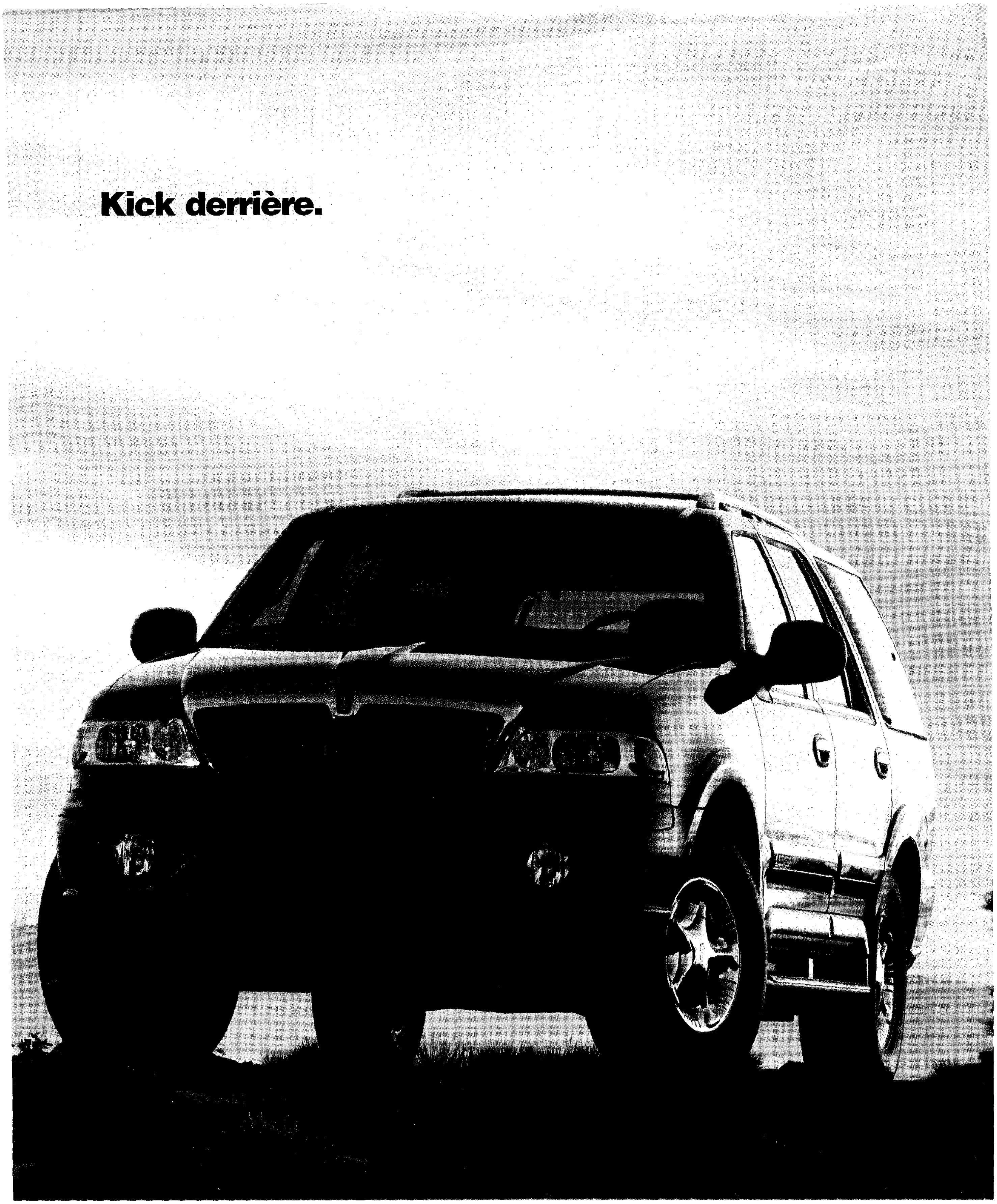
On a late-spring morning last year, while my wife was still asleep and my sons were groggily adjusting their eyes to "Rugrats," I grabbed a basketball out of the coat closet and dribbled up the street to the asphalt courts at Seventy-sixth and Riverside. I don't quite know how to explain such irrational moments except to say that something in the brain must agree that the thrill of playing—the pebbly feel of the ball, the one decent shot among a dozen bricks—overwhelms the foreknowledge of all the pain, the locked back and stinging calves, that surely follows.

It was a beautiful morning for playing: in a minute I'd kicked away the broken bottles and the sun glittered on the river and the cars along the West Side Highway moaned like pigeons. But it was early yet—too early for the full-court crowd. The only middle-aged types around were the ascetic runners joylessly whipping past the fence and on up to Washington Heights. The lithe young shooters and dunkers whom I knew by face and first names were, I safely assumed, still recovering from their Friday revels. They'd show around ten. It was all kids just now—kids eleven, twelve, thirteen years old, boys mostly, shooting around.

I shot at a steel backboard with a bunch of kids who were doing what kids do during the Finals. They mimicked everyone on the teams in question—the Utah Jazz and the Chicago Bulls. They aped Scottie Pippen's quick-release jumper in the lane and Ron Harper's downtown heaves. Like earnest A students, a wiry little kid with glasses and his chubby big brother even ran a slo-mo pick-and-roll, à la John Stockton and Karl Malone. They'd absorbed everything; it was just as it had been when I was their age and was trying to imitate Willis Reed's bellowing breaths at the foul line or Dick Barnett's soigné jumper from the deep corners of the court. The curious thing is that none of the boys—not one—imitated Michael Jordan: not the fall-away shot in the lane, not the tongue-dangling drive to the hoop, not even the burlesque ass-waggling back-to-the-basket pivot move that has humiliated a generation of defenders. The kids were not especially reverent; they did a fine job of mocking Dennis Rodman's splay-legged rebounds and a cloddish Luc Longley mistake that had ended with a Keatonesque pratfall. But not Jordan; they wouldn't go there.

I asked why, and they seemed appalled. "You just don't do that," one of them said. "You don't imitate Michael Jordan."

They were kids, with a kid's frame of reference. They couldn't yet know that Jordan was as fierce as Patton, as graceful as Nureyev, as creative as Armstrong—all those grasping similes were not yet theirs. But they knew what they knew. They were New York fans, beaten and disappointed, but also thrilled a thousand times by an incomparable athlete. A few nights later, Michael Jordan won his sixth N.B.A. title and ended his career with a move so exquisite that his defender stumbled in mystification. On the courts the next morning, everyone was talking about it, but no one tried it. —David Remnick



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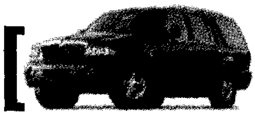
Lincoln Navigator. What a luxury [] should be.

KOHINA TURNED OUT TO BE AN EVEN MORE CELEBRATED GEISHA THAN I WAS IN MY PRIME, but I don't think she ever recognized her own beauty. She never understood why men treated her the way they did. I remember when she was an apprentice, there was a certain actor—let's call him Mr. Ikeda—who used to come to the Gion district all the time. He was quite popular among the geisha because he was rarely moody, but he never once asked for me—until, that is, I took on Kohina as my younger sister and began to train her. I could tell from the start that Kohina found him enchanting: she'd seen all his films, and she was in awe, really. Yet somehow it never occurred to her he might feel attracted to her too.

Then one evening as we arrived at the Mitsuyo Teahouse, the mistress took us aside to say that Mr. Ikeda had been sitting alone a half-hour in the little room overlooking the moss garden, turning down all her offers of company, just waiting for us and no one else. We slid the door open a crack to peek in, and there he sat, drawing lines in the beaded moisture on an unopened bottle of Absolut Vodka. Beside it on the table stood two untouched glasses. "Only two glasses," I said to Kohina. "He's waiting for you, not both of us."

She was wearing a cinnamon-colored kimono with a design of autumn grasses, and she looked magnificent, but I could see she had no confidence in herself. I'm not sure what she would have done if I hadn't stepped aside and slid the door open so she had no choice but to go in. She gave me such a look! Nervous and excited all at once. The flush in her skin reminded me how she'd appeared that afternoon when she'd stepped from the bath into the chilly air, still steaming.

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